

COZY UP TO WINTER SQUASH

One of my favorite ingredients as a chill starts to hit the air is winter squash. With several varieties and potential applications, winter squash is easy to add to your meal and side dish rotation. They are nutrient-rich, and delicious and come in several shapes, sizes, and colors. Pumpkin, which seems to be everywhere once September rolls around, is likely the most common of winter squash varieties. Other varieties include bell-shaped butternut squash with a sweet, nutty flavor, small, round, dark green acorn squash, light yellow oblong spaghetti squash with its trademark stringy flesh, and small oblong delicata squash with its thin edible skin.

The flesh of most winter squash is yellow to orange, which lends to higher concentrations of vitamins A and C supporting immune health and skin health, and antioxidants beta carotene and lutein known for supporting eye health and potentially reducing the risk of certain cancers.

Winter squash offers a mild natural sweetness, is a good source of high-quality carbohydrates, and is rich in fiber supporting sustainable energy, digestive health, and satiety. Supporting blood pressure regulation, winter squash is rich in potassium and rich in magnesium essential for muscle and nerve function.



Winter squash can be prepared in many ways and pairs well with flavors like maple syrup, curry powder, chilies, herbs, and tangy vinegar. My kids love my butternut squash soup with pears, curry, and creamy coconut milk. Roasting brings out squash's natural sweetness. Acorn squash is great for stuffing with wild rice, lentils, and vegetables for a hearty vegetarian entrée. Sliced acorn or delicata squash roasts beautifully with herbs, chili flakes, pomegranate seeds, or balsamic vinegar. Cooked spaghetti squash separates into firm strands and makes a tasty low-carb, high-fiber alternative to pasta.



I love sharing my stealth health cooking tips, and winter squash is one of my favorite tools. I keep canned pumpkin puree stocked in my pantry all year. I can sneak it into smoothies and chocolate muffins. My children also enjoy pumpkin pancakes made with whole-grain pancake mix as long as chocolate chips are added. Butternut squash plays well with savory flavors. It can be pureed and mixed with tomato sauce in pasta dishes or blended with chicken broth or cottage cheese to use in place of milk or cream in mac and cheese.

While winter squash can appear intimidating to prepare, you can start by thoroughly washing the exterior, cutting off the stem end with a sharp knife, and then turning the squash cut side down for stability on a cutting board. Cut it down the center, splitting it in half, and then scoop the seeds from the center. Squash seeds can also be saved and roasted just like pumpkin seeds. For another shortcut, butternut squash can often be found pre-diced in the produce aisle or frozen food aisle in the grocery store.

While the recipe I'm about to share may not be completely healthy, it is a healthier take on a pumpkin pie or chocolate silk pie. It is adapted from the cooking blog [Chocolate Covered Katie](#). Personally, I don't mind using stevia, monkfruit, or allulose in my baking endeavors to cut down on added sugars. The graham cracker crust can be purchased pre-made or made from scratch. As this pie has become my family's traditional Thanksgiving dessert for the last several years, I opt for the convenience. This can be made up to 2 days in advance and stored in the fridge. Serve with whipped cream if you wish.

Note: Since everyone's health history and nutritional needs are so different, please make sure that you talk with your doctor and a registered dietitian to get advice about the diet and exercise plan that's right for you.



CHOCOLATE PUMPKIN PIE

INGREDIENTS

1 15 oz can pureed pumpkin (not pumpkin pie filling)

1 tsp vanilla extract

1 tsp pumpkin pie spice

2 tsp cacao powder

¼ tsp salt

¼ cup sweetener of choice or 1-2 droppers

full of liquid stevia or monkfruit

1 cup stevia or monkfruit-sweetened

chocolate chips

Prepared graham cracker crust

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Combine all of the ingredients except the chocolate chips and crust in a food processor and blend to mix.
2. Melt chocolate chips in a heat-safe bowl in the microwave in 30 second intervals until smooth.
3. Pour chocolate into a food processor and blend until well combined, pausing to scrape down mixture as needed.
4. Pour mixture into prepared graham cracker crust and smooth over the top. Chill in the fridge for a minimum of 3 to 4 hours before serving.