

FARMER IN THE FIELD



FALL IN LOVE WITH WINTER SQUASH

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Fall is in the air and slowly we have to say good-bye to the bounty of summer flavors we all enjoy. Plants are getting tired and reaching the end of their productivity and the first frost will kill whatever delicate ones are left in the fields, tilled under to make way for heartier winter crops. Other plants are starting to tire but are leaving behind a multitude of beautiful pumpkins and winter squash. Many pumpkins will be used for Halloween and fall decorating but many varieties are long keepers and will be around throughout the winter. With California being one of the largest producers of winter squash let's once again hale the California soil and weather and be grateful for living in one of the greatest places on earth. Yeah!

Winter squash is usually steamed, boiled or baked although I prefer baking because it retains more of the squashes rich flavors. One year after we closed our pumpkin patch we had a taste off, cutting the different squash into wedges, wrapping them in foil and grilling them. It was a great way to get to know our squash. There are varieties such as Acorn squash with its nutty meaty taste and Banana squash with its beautiful golden yummy flesh. Butternut squash has a wonderfully sweet, moist and nutty flavor and unlike many squash they are easy to peel making them very popular amongst chefs and home cooks. Spaghetti Squash is always fun to eat. When cooked you can scoop out the flesh with a fork and what does it resemble? You guessed it, spaghetti and it is a healthy alternative to the starchy pasta. So get to know your winter squash, it could turn into a lifelong love affair.

Tips for cooking

Many winter squash have a hard protective shell which allows for a long shelf life. You may want to tap the tip of your knife into the squash to get it started and then cut. Be careful.

Stay away from your Jack-o-lantern pumpkins, carve them but don't eat them.

Try cooking some of the specialty pumpkins such as Cinderella and Jardale varieties. Mini Pumpkins are good for stuffing.

Use the same spices you would use with sweet potatoes.

- ▶ Brown sugar, cinnamon and nutmeg
- ▶ Sautee' garlic with fresh sage