

SQUASH

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Cut the squash in half, then scoop out the seeds with a spoon. Set the cut side down to cut into wedges or smaller pieces. Enlist help to cut up the squash. The reward is delicious!

After the squash is peeled, cut or sliced, you can keep it in the refrigerator for three to five days. This makes weekday squash cooking doable for time-pressured cooks. You can freeze raw diced squash on a baking sheet until solid. Then scoop the frozen pieces into a freezer-safe bag and freeze for up to six months, so you can make fresh squash soups, stews and braises all year long. Cooked squash also keeps well in the refrigerator and can be frozen.

The seeds can be rinsed, salted and slow-roasted in a 200 degree Fahrenheit oven, stirring often, for an hour or more, until crispy. They make a healthy snack or a crunchy addition to salads.

Now that you know how to cook squash, test your skills with these five recipes.

GRILLED BUTTERNUT SQUASH ROUNDS

Butternut squash is the gift that keeps on giving. I cut the bulbous end into cubes for roasting, steaming or soup. The longer neck of the squash can be peeled and sliced into round slabs, which are perfect for grilling.

Serve these grilled squash rounds on brioche rolls smeared with mayonnaise and topped with grilled onion and pickles for a very satisfying meatless burger. Or, sprinkle with herbs and a little lime juice and serve with cooked farro or French lentils.

Prep: 15 minutes
Cook: 15 minutes
Makes 6 slices
1 very large butternut squash, about 3 1/2 pounds, with a thick "neck" 3 inches or more in diameter
Expeller pressed canola oil, safflower oil or sunflower oil
2 teaspoons chili powder
1 teaspoon coarse (kosher) salt
1. Preheat a gas grill or prepare a charcoal grill for moderately low heat.

Cut the squash in half so you have the bulbous end and the longer neck. Save the bulbous end for another use (peeled and cubed for steaming, for example). Peel the neck of the squash, then lay it flat on a cutting board and use a large sharp knife to cut it into 3/8-inch thick rounds. Place the rounds on a baking sheet and brush generously with oil. Sprinkle both sides with chili powder and salt. Grill covered over low heat, turning once, until tender when pierced with a fork, about 15 minutes. Serve warm.

ROASTED ACORN SQUASH, TWO WAYS

Baking squash whole for a short period of time will soften it somewhat so it's easier to cut in half.

Prep: 10 minutes
Cook: 1 1/4 hours
Makes 2 servings
For the squash:
1 large acorn squash
Expeller pressed canola oil, safflower or sunflower oil
Coarse (kosher) salt
3 tablespoons Caper-raisin relish (see recipe in notes)



Roasted Acorn Squash.

OR 2 tablespoons butter and 1 tablespoon sriracha
Chopped fresh herbs, such as chives, basil or cilantro
Heat oven to 375 degrees Fahrenheit. Pierce 1 large acorn squash in several places with the tip of a sharp knife. Put into a baking dish. Bake until squash starts to soften, about 20 minutes, then remove from the oven. Carefully cut squash in half and scoop out seeds. Brush cut side with oil. Sprinkle all over with salt. Return to the baking dish cut side up. Bake until flesh is tender when pierced with a fork, 40-50 minutes. Spoon some of the Caper-raisin relish into each squash cavity. Or, put half of the butter and sriracha into each cavity. Return to the oven to heat through, about 10 minutes. Serve hot or warm topped with herbs.

KABOCHA HASH WITH MINTED RICOTTA

Prep: 30 minutes
Cook: 20 minutes
Makes 2 main course or 4 side-dish servings
Ingredients:
Caper raisin relish, see recipe in notes
1/2 cup ricotta cheese
1 tablespoon minced fresh mint leaves
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon coarsely ground black pepper
4 cups (16-20 ounces) cubed, peeled kabocha squash (about 3/4-inch piece size)
1/3 cup water
1 1/2 tablespoons coconut oil or expeller pressed canola oil or safflower oil
1 medium-size red or sweet onion, peeled, halved, cut into 1/4-inch wedges
1 small poblano or red bell pepper, cored, diced 1/3-inch
1 small jalapeno, halved, seeded, finely chopped
Directions:

Make Caper raisin relish. Mix 1/2 cup ricotta, 1 tablespoon minced mint leaves, 1/2 teaspoon salt and 1/4 teaspoon pepper in a small bowl. Let stand at room temperature for up to 30 minutes or refrigerate covered for up to a day. Put 4 cups kabocha squash cubes in a microwave-safe bowl and add 1/3 cup water. Cover with microwave-safe plastic wrap, vented at one corner. Microwave on high (100% power), stirring once or twice, until nearly tender, about 5 minutes. Let stand for 5 minutes. Drain. Heat a large, well-seasoned cast-iron or nonstick skillet over medium heat until hot. Add 1 1/2 tablespoons oil, then 1 chopped onion. Cook, stirring often, until golden, about 5 minutes. Stir in drained squash, 1 diced poblano and 1 finely-chopped jalapeno. Cook, mashing squash lightly until things start to get crusty and crispy, about 10 minutes. Serve hot dolloped with minted ricotta and some of the caper raisin relish.

CAPER-RAISIN RELISH

This nearly-addictive sweet and tangy caper raisin relish complements virtually everything from simple steamed squash to grilled poultry. Try it over pasta tossed

with shredded Romano cheese for a bold-flavored dish. Omit the anchovies if they are not your thing, but replace them with some dried mushroom powder or a splash of soy sauce for an umami punch.

1/4 cup dark raisins
2 tablespoons very hot water
2 tablespoons drained capers
1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
1 clove crushed garlic
1 1/2 teaspoons finely minced anchovy fillet or 1/2 teaspoon mushroom powder
1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon black pepper

SPAGHETTI SQUASH WITH SPICY WALNUT PICADA AND PARMESAN

Spaghetti squash does best in a steamy environment. A microwave oven proves perfect. I cook one half at a time, cut side down in water. Then, after a cooling-off period, I use a large fork to pull it into long strands — hence its name.

Prep: 20 minutes
Cook: 25 minutes
Makes 4 to 6 servings
Ingredients:
1 spaghetti squash, about 3 pounds, halved lengthwise, seeds removed
Water
3/4 cup walnut pieces
3 tablespoons walnut oil or extra virgin olive oil
3 tablespoons chopped flat leaf parsley,
3 tablespoons chopped chives (or green onion tops)
1/2 teaspoon minced fresh rosemary or 1/4 teaspoon dried
1/2 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
Finely grated zest from 1 lemon
Coarse (kosher salt), freshly ground black pepper to taste
1 large clove garlic, crushed
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
Freshly shredded Parmesan or Asiago cheese
Directions:

Put one spaghetti squash half, cut side down in a microwave-safe casserole dish. Add 1 inch of water to the dish. Cover with lid or microwave-safe plastic wrap vented at one corner. Microwave on high (100% power) until squash pierces easily with the tip of a knife, about 10 minutes. Cool. Repeat to cook the other squash half. Meanwhile, for walnut picada, toast 3/4 cup walnut pieces in a small nonstick skillet just until fragrant, 2-3 minutes. Do not walk away or nuts might burn. Cool on a cutting board, then chop finely. Mix chopped walnuts, 3 tablespoons walnut oil, 3 tablespoons chopped parsley, 3 tablespoons chopped chives, 1/2 teaspoon minced rosemary, 1/2 teaspoon pepper flakes and lemon zest in a small bowl. Season with 1/2 teaspoon salt and 1/4 teaspoon pepper. Use the tines of a large fork to pull the cooked squash from the skin in long shreds. Place shreds in a serving bowl. Toss with 1 clove crushed garlic and 1 tablespoon olive oil. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve warm sprinkled with the walnut picada.

This dip's cool as a cucumber

By LIGAYA FIGUERAS
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Last summer, I had such a windfall of home-grown cucumbers that I began shoving them in the mailbox as a gift for the letter carrier.

This year's planting hasn't been nearly as prolific, so I've been a bit more mindful about how best to prepare them. Gazpacho, pickles and cucumber salad are easy and tasty, but I wanted to do something unexpected with this limited crop of cukes.

Culinarian Elizabeth Heiskell offers a cooling cucumber dip in her latest cookbook, "Come On Over! Southern Delicious for Every Day and Every Occasion" (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, \$30). The recipe is a simple mix of cucumber pulp; dairy staples sour cream, Greek yogurt and mayonnaise; dill, garlic, salt and pepper for seasoning; and hits of vinegar and lemon juice for acid. But simple can be sublime.

"I beg you to try this knockout," she writes in the headnote. Besides serving the chilled dip with crudites and crostini (or just grab a bag of tortilla chips as I did), she suggests pairing it with lamb, cold-poached salmon, or even hamburgers and hot dogs.

Heiskell calls for the cucumbers to be peeled before processing them, but if you've got unwaxed organic cucumbers, you don't have to discard those long green strips. Mads Refslund, who co-founded

famed NOMA restaurant in Denmark with Rene Redzepi, proposes giving peels a second life in his ode to trash cooking, "Scraps, Wilt & Weeds: Turning Wasted Food Into Plenty" (Grand Central Publishing, 2017). Brine and time (3 to 5 days) are all it takes for cucumber peels to become sour enough to add to a banh mi, burger or Reuben.

COLD CUCUMBER DIP

1 1/2 pounds cucumbers, peeled, cut in half lengthwise, seeds removed
Salt and pepper
3/4 cup sour cream
3/4 cup plain Greek yogurt
1/4 cup mayonnaise
3 tablespoons chopped dill
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
2 teaspoons minced garlic
2 teaspoons Champagne vinegar

Using a food processor, puree the cucumbers. Line a colander with a cheesecloth and set it in the sink. Mix 1 1/2 teaspoons salt with the cucumber puree and transfer it to the colander. Let sit and drain for 1 hour.

Gather the cheesecloth together and give the cucumber one more good squeeze to ensure it's as dry as possible.

Place the cucumber pulp in a bowl and add the sour cream, yogurt, mayonnaise, dill, lemon juice, garlic, vinegar and 1/8 teaspoon pepper. Mix well.

Add more salt and pepper to taste. Cover and refrigerate until chilled thoroughly, at least 2 hours or up to 4 days, before serving.

Serves 6.
Nutritional information
Per serving: 120 calories

(percent of calories from fat, 61), 3 g protein, 9 g carbohydrates, 1 g fiber, 8 g total fat (3 g saturated), 20 mg cholesterol, 108 mg sodium.

— Excerpted from "Come On Over! Southern Delicious for Every Day and Every Occasion" © 2021 by Elizabeth Heiskell. Reproduced by permission of Mariner Books, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers. All rights reserved.

BRINED CUCUMBER PEEL

Peels from 3 unwaxed organic cucumbers
4 cups water
0.7 ounces (3 teaspoons) kosher salt (exact proportion is critical for brining)

Pack the cucumber peels into a sterilized large ceramic pot or gallon Mason jar (not metal).

Pour the water into the container and add the salt. Put with a lid that fits inside the crock (a drop lid) on the solution and a weight so that the peels do not rise above the salt solution.

Leave the container covered at room temperature for 3 to 5 days, checking it from time to time, until it starts to bubble. If a white bubbly foam appears, skim it off. If a dark scum or mold appears, this means that the jar or some other element was not sterile and you will need to throw it out in the compost.

Taste for sourness and if it is sour enough, lightly rinse the cucumbers, transfer to a jar, and refrigerate for up to 3 weeks.

Makes 1 1/2 cups.
Nutritional information
Per tablespoon: 3 calories (percent of calories from fat, 12), trace protein, trace carbohydrates, trace fiber, trace total fat (no saturated fat), no cholesterol, 240 mg sodium.



Ligaya Figueras/Atlanta Journal-Constitution-TNS
Cold Cucumber Dip from "Come On Over!" by Elizabeth Heiskell.

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