

Yellow squash the versatile vegetable of summer

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If you cook according to the seasons, then yellow squash dominates the ingredient list in summer.

At farmers markets each June, the produce beckons with joy like a field of sunflowers. The vegetable usually is easy to grow, making it a good option for first-time gardeners too.

The two dominant varieties of yellow squash are crookneck and straight. I have not detected a difference in flavor between the two, so I usually gravitate to the former because it's what I grew up picking in my grandparents' garden.

Yellow squash is like a perfect friend in the kitchen: not a lot of fuss, and up for anything. It has a mild flavor, so it pairs well with just about any meat.

The vegetable can be boiled, steamed, grilled, roasted or sautéed in a skillet with butter and/or oil, diced onions, salt and pepper (also called frying by some Texas cooks I know). Because of its mild flavor, yellow squash also is agreeable in casseroles and soups, helping to bulk out the dish without overpowering the other ingredients.

Two medium yellow squash (about 6 inches long) weigh about one pound raw. When cooked, the two squash will yield about 1 ½ cups, according to the Michigan State University Extension program.

I suggest roasting or steaming a large batch of yellow squash to enjoy initially as a simple side dish. The leftovers then can be incorporated into one of the following baked dishes.

Both are updates from recipes in "Best of the Best from Texas" (1985) by Gwen McKee and Barbara Mosely. The authors gleaned recipes from 80 Texas cookbooks to showcase "the state's diverse cuisine."

The Texican Squash recipe originally was published in "Microwave Know-How" by CiCi Williamson and Ann Steiner. I converted the recipe for baking in the oven. With green chilies and jalapenos, this side dish demands attention.

"The Galveston Island Cookbook" by the Women of Trinity Episcopal Church was the original source for the Royal Squash recipe.



Yellow squash usually is bountiful at farmers markets during the summer. LAURA GUTSCHKE/REPORTER-NEWS

My major alteration is blending the squash mixture and stuffing, instead of making them separate layers in a baking dish. The blended version gave a more cohesive, consistent flavor in each bite.

I also replaced the can of cream of chicken soup with heavy whipping cream and milk.

Share your favorite recipes or food-related historical recollections by emailing Laura Gutschke at laura.gutschke@reporternews.com.

Texican squash

- 3 cups cooked yellow squash
- 1 medium white onion, diced
- 1 (4-ounce) can green chilies, chopped
- 1-2 jalapenos, seeded and minced
- 2 cups (8 ounces) Cheddar, Colby-Jack or Monterey Jack cheese, grated

1 cup sour cream

Salt

Freshly ground black pepper

1 ½ cups crushed flavored tortilla chips

Paprika

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Butter a 2-quart glass baking dish and set aside.

In a large bowl, gently combine squash, onion, green chilies (including liquid), jalapeno(s), cheese and sour cream. Season with salt and pepper.

Spread half of the crushed chips on the bottom of the prepared baking dish.

Pour squash mixture in dish and sprinkle with remaining chips to top. Dust with paprika. Bake for 25-30 minutes, until heated through and top is golden brown. Yields 8 servings.

Royal squash

- ½ cup (1 stick) butter, melted
- 1 (12-ounce) package stuffing mix
- 3 cups cooked yellow squash
- 1 medium red (or white) onion, diced
- 1 carrot, grated
- 1 cup heavy whipping cream
- ½ cup whole milk
- 1 (8-ounce) container sour cream
- Dash of garlic salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Butter a 2.50- to 3-quart glass baking dish and set aside.

In a large bowl, mix well the butter and stuffing mix.

Fold in the squash, onion, carrot, heavy whipping cream, milk and sour cream. Season to taste with garlic salt and pepper.

Pour mixture into the prepared baking dish. Bake for 25-30 minutes, until heated through and top is golden brown. Yields 10 servings.