



WINTER SQUASH

What is It?

- Winter squash is a kind of squash that is harvested in the fall and can be stored for many months throughout winter. Unlike summer squash, they form a tough rind, which helps them store longer.
- Popular winter squash varieties include butternut, spaghetti, acorn, banana, buttercup, Hubbard, Kuri, delicata, and of course, pumpkin. There are dozens of varieties grown in Washington.
- Winter squash is native to Central America and has been consumed by people for over 10,000 years.
- Squash plants help bees and other pollinators by producing big, colorful flowers.
- Many Native American tribes across North America traditionally planted squash together with maize (corn) and beans, calling them the "three sisters." When the crops are grown together they create a symbiotic system, meaning that each one enhances the health of the others.



Delicata squash, credit: WSDA

Grow It

Winter squash can be a fun addition to a school garden, though it needs considerable garden space, as plant vines will grow three to five feet long before fruiting. Winter squash plants also prefer full sun. Start seedlings indoors three to four weeks prior to planned planting date. Harden off seedlings for a week by setting them outdoors for a few hours each day, gradually extending the length of time outdoors each day for one week. Plant hardened off seedlings outdoors one week before last frost or plant seeds directly in garden. Winter squash may be grown in larger containers, but the vines and squash may need to be trellised or supported as they grow outside of the container. Vines will begin to die off as the squash reaches harvest time.





Make It

Be sure to follow local Food Safety rules and regulations. Learn more here: [Food Safety Rules and Regulations | Washington State Department of Health](#).

Recipe: Lentil Squash Hummus Yield: 16 sample size servings	
Ingredients	Directions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 winter squash, any variety, cut in half and seeded • 2 tablespoons butter • 2 tablespoons pure maple syrup • 1/2 to 1 cup water 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Place squash skin side down in the slow cooker. You should be able to fit both halves (or more) in at a time. 2. Place 1 tablespoon each of butter and maple syrup in each squash cavity. 3. Pour water into the bottom of the slow cooker to about 1/2 inch. 4. Cover and cook on high for 3 1/2–4 1/2 hours. The time will depend on the size and variety of your squash. Varieties like acorn, delicata, and carnival squash will cook quickly while butternut, kabocha, and red Kuri will take longer. 5. Remove the squash onto the plate or casserole dish using the tongs. Use a spoon to mash and stir the butter, syrup, and squash together. This can be done inside the skin of the squash. 6. Serve and enjoy!

Recipe adapted from [Washington Agriculture in the Classroom](#).

Explore interactive taste test resources to encourage participants to try what you made!
[Taste-Testing Event Resources](#)



Squashy Sensory Exploration

Learn It

Grades 1st–4th

Objectives

- Use their senses to learn about winter squash.
- Practice scientific drawing, using descriptive words.
- Be able to describe the taste of raw and cooked winter squash.

Materials

- Several varieties of winter squash, prepared the following ways
 - Whole, raw
 - Cut in half, raw
 - Cubed, raw
 - Cubed, roasted
- Several types of winter squash seeds, raw and roasted
- Tasting spoons (one or two for each student)
- Student notebooks or paper, writing utensils
- Pictures of several varieties of squash and squash plants

Consider asking for assistance from your food service manager, head cook, culinary or family and consumer science teachers to help prepare foods.

Directions

Prior to the lesson, set up five stations where students will explore squash using their five senses.

Recommended stations:

- Whole squash of different varieties for students to draw and observe;
- A variety of raw squash cut in half with seeds exposed for students to feel, smell, and diagram;
- Roasted squash seeds for students to taste and describe;
- Roasted squash and raw squash chunks for students to taste test;
- Pictures of a squash plant and whole squash varieties to diagram.

Have students rotate through each station in small groups. Encourage students to draw diagrams with labels and generate vocabulary that describes how they experience squash with their senses; ask guiding questions to help with this process.

After students rotate through the stations, meet as a whole class to share observations, surprising finds, things students learned, and diagrams in journals. Record vocabulary generated at the stations, focusing on descriptive and positive words that describe nutritious foods (crunchy, yellow, etc.).





Squashy Sensory Exploration

Learn It

Directions

Optional extensions include:

- Have students measure the circumference of multiple squash and compare difference.
- Ask students to guess how many seeds are inside, charting their responses. Fourth grade students could find the average of all guesses. Cut the squash open, count the seeds, and determine whose guess was closest.

Lesson adapted from Vital Communities and Vermont Harvest of the Month.



Eat It

While the nutrient profile varies with the type of winter squash, most types are loaded with vitamin A, a nutrient that is important for eyesight, skin, and cell growth, and vitamin C, which helps with healing, keeps skin and gums healthy, and supports immune function. Winter squash are also packed with fiber, which is important for maintaining a healthy heart and digestive system and regulating blood sugar.



Spaghetti squash, credit: WSDA

Read It

- The Little Squash Seed, by Gayla Scale
- Sophie's Squash, by Pat Zietlow Miller and Anne Wilsdorf
- In the Three Sisters Garden, by JoAnne Denee and Carolyn Peduzzi
- Pumpkin Pumpkin, by Jeanne Titherington
- Too Many Pumpkins, written by Linda White, illustrated by Megan Lloyd

More About It

- Lesson for grades K–3 from Healthy Schools Campaign: [Squash-Lesson-Plan.pdf](#)
- Lesson for Schools and Adult Learners from South Dakota State University Extension: [Squash - Schools and Adults](#)
- Lessons from Washington Agriculture in the Classroom:
 - Grade K–2nd: [Storing Winter Squash](#)
 - Grade 3rd–5th: [Three Sisters Garden](#)
 - Grade 6th–8th: [The Geography of Thanksgiving Dinner Classroom](#)
 - Grade 9th–12th: [The Geography of Thanksgiving Dinner](#)

This resource was adapted for Washington state from Montana Harvest of the Classroom Bites: Winter Squash
[Winter Squash Classroom Bites](#)