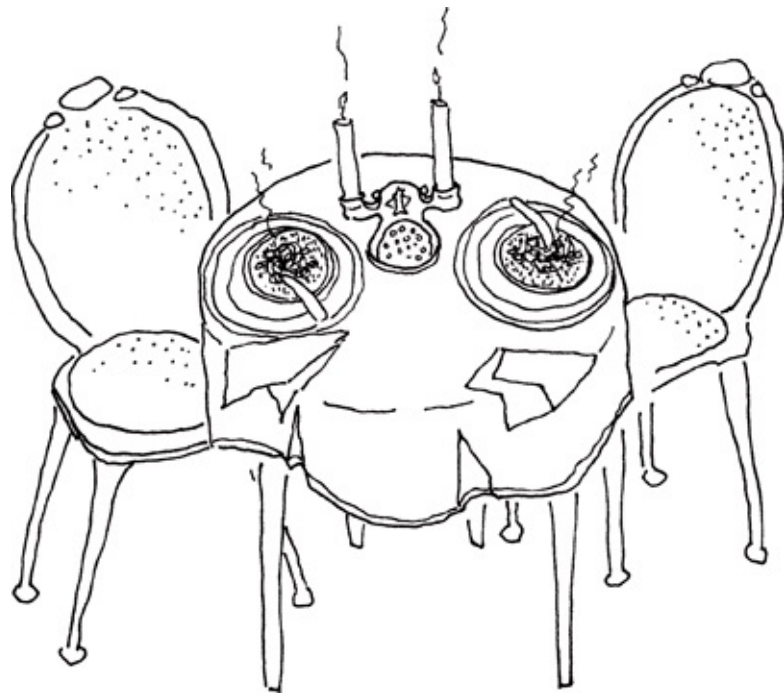


THE CLASSIC

ZUCCHINI COOKBOOK



THE CLASSIC
ZUCCHINI COOKBOOK

225 Recipes
for All Kinds of Squash

Nancy C. Ralston, Marynor Jordan, and Andrea Chesman

Illustrations by Laurie Hadlock



Storey Publishing

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To Richard, Rory, and Sam

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Preface

I don't know when I've had more fun in the kitchen. Making up recipes for zucchini is almost like child's play. You can do anything with zucchini and get good results.

So when I received a phone call asking me if I was interested in taking on a revision of *Garden Way's Zucchini Cookbook* 25 years after its original publication, I was happy to say yes. Immediately contracts were signed, zucchini was planted, and meetings were arranged. At one of those meetings, I happened to mention to a sales manager at Storey Books that I thought zucchini was basically a boring, bland vegetable, and his jaw dropped. But that's a good thing, I hastened to add. Because it means that you can do a lot with it — and many people will be glad to buy a cookbook that presents new ideas for preparing this versatile vegetable.

That an overabundance of zucchini can be a problem is uncontested. Every article I have ever read about zucchini mentions a New England joke: Why do Vermonters (or Bay Staters, or Mainers, whatever — you supply your favorite state) have to lock their car doors every August? To keep people from filling their cars with zucchini, of course! I can't verify that a car filling has ever occurred, but I have driven past many driveways that feature an overflowing bushel basket of zucchini and a sign reading "Free. *Please* take one."

Last summer, when I tested recipes for this cookbook and fed my family zucchini just about every single day, I supplied almost all of my testing needs with three plants of zucchini. That's a lot of zucchini for a minimal amount of gardening effort.

My breakthrough moment in the kitchen occurred about a week after attending a zucchini festival, where I heard tales of "mock apple pies" made with zucchini instead of apples. I followed the directions I was given and was amazed. If you peel zucchini and cook it in lemon juice with enough sugar and spice, you get something very much like apple pie filling. I took the pie to a picnic and completely enjoyed the incredulous looks I received when I told my friends the pie was made with zucchini, not apples. I had fooled everyone.

My son looked up from his slice and told me I should call it "Zapple Pie." After the Zapple Pie, we started thinking up titles for other recipes. Zapple Pie was swiftly followed by Zesto Pizza (pesto plus zucchini) and Zingerbread (gingerbread plus zucchini). The naming was fun, and the recipe-testing results were delicious. We moved on to Zesto Pasta Salad and Zapple Strudel, as well as Squoconut Pie, coconut custard pie made with yellow squash and coconut flavoring, but no coconut.

Pesto, pasta, pizza — these dishes weren't even on the distant horizon when Marynor Jordan and Nancy Ralston wrote the first edition of this book 25 years ago. That was a time when we were still eating an awful lot of ground beef, chicken was mostly roasted on a Sunday, and quality fresh fish was rarely found away from the coast. Whole wheat and bran were tossed with abandon into desserts, healthy eating often meant a punishing lentil loaf, and dinner for the rest of us was a casserole in which cream of mushroom soup featured prominently.

Much has changed since then. Our cooking is very much influenced by the foods of the Mediterranean, of which zucchini was an early example. A wider range of fresh vegetables and herbs is available from local supermarkets year-round. These days, we eat a lot more chicken, fish, and vegetarian meals. When we hunger for a change of pace, we don't think twice about whipping up a Thai curry or a Tex-Mex platter of enchiladas. We grill vegetables all summer, and we roast them all winter. In between, we sauté in heart-healthy olive oil, and we are generous with the seasonings, especially garlic. The new recipes in this edition reflect these changes. Of course, many of the old favorites have been retained as well.

I've heard it said that a true test of friendship is a willingness to accept extra zucchini in September. It is my hope that armed with this cookbook, you will have as much fun in the kitchen as have had, and that your friendships are always enriched and never strained by an abundance of zucchini and other squash.

Audra Chumley



1. Becoming Acquainted with Squash

Squash has a history of causing confusion. While Europeans were still cultivating only various types of inedible gourds, New World natives had been enjoying squash and pumpkins for at least 7,000 years. The confusion arose when the first European explorers visited the Americas and reported that the native people were cultivating a type of melon. It was a mistake made again and again; because Europeans had never seen anything like squash, they had no word for it. Nonetheless, the first European settlers in North America, who couldn't be too choosy given their circumstances, readily adopted squash as a food.

Native Americans introduced the first European settlers in New England to beans, corn (maize), and pumpkins, “the three sisters.” They treated them to a seafood chowder made with “Indian squash that at least one writer condemned as “the meanest of God’s blessings.” But after experiencing the New England winter, the Pilgrims came to appreciate pumpkin and squash for their prolific harvests that staved off starvation.

Native Americans showed the settlers how to bake whole pumpkins by burying them in the ashes of a fire, then cutting them open and serving them with animal fat and maple syrup or honey. The Pilgrims “improved” on this recipe: They opened the pumpkins up; scooped out the seeds and fibers; filled the cavities with milk, sweetener, and spices; replaced the tops; then baked the pumpkins. In addition, a recipe for “Pompkin Pie” appeared in Amelia Simmons’s 1796 cookbook. Ever since, pie has been the predominant use for pumpkins in North America, despite a plethora of pumpkin recipes dating from those early days, including stews and soups, sauce for meat and fish, pancakes, breads, and butters. One can only imagine the flavor of early “pumpkin beer,” brewed from a combination of pumpkin, persimmons, and maple syrup. Thus, winter squash became and remains a staple in New England.

It turns out, however, that botanists don't agree on a firm line dividing pumpkins from winter squash, or winter squash from summer squash. Scientists have identified four basic types of edible squashes. *Cucurbita pepo* is noted for its pentagonal stems with prickly spines. This group includes pumpkins and acorn squash, all summer squashes, spaghetti squash, and numerous gourds. Butternut squash, which is one of the best replacements for pumpkin in any recipe, is considered another species entirely (*C. moshata*, which has pentagonal stems without spines). *Cucurbita maxima* (those with round stems) includes buttercup, Hubbard, and turban squashes. *Cucurbita mixta* includes white and green cushaws and the Tennessee sweet potato squash.

From a culinary perspective, the relevant difference among these squashes is how mature they are when we eat them. Summer squash is eaten when immature, before the seeds have developed. Winter squash and pumpkins are eaten fully mature, after seeds and a hard shell have developed.

Although winter squash and pumpkin rapidly became staples in New World kitchens, summer squash was not common until the 1950s, when zucchini was reintroduced from Italy. It came via a circuitous route. In the 1820s, a South American squash called the Valparaiso was introduced to Europe. As its use became more widespread, this long, thick, meaty squash became known as “vegetable marrow” in England and “cocozele” in France and Italy. Increasing travel in the post-World War II era slowly broadened American palates, and refrigerated rail cars and other improvements increased the availability of a wider range of foods. Home gardeners were the first to pick up the zucchini, which was accepted rapidly. Today zucchini and other summer squash are supermarket staples.

Summer Squash Varieties

Most summer squash recipes are interchangeable. All summer squashes have tender, edible skins and flesh that ranges from mild and nutty to buttery or cucumber-like. But the shape and appearance of these squashes vary considerably. More and more varieties are available from garden seed catalogs, farm stands, and supermarkets, and it is fun to grow and cook new types. Many summer squashes go by several different names.



Chayote. This squash breaks all the rules, starting with having one seed, which is edible. Chayote looks like a pale green mango with furrowed skin. Because the skin is quite tough, it is usually peeled, although this is not necessary if the chayote is young and fresh. Once peeled, it can be used in any summer squash recipe. Chayote is also known as *mirliton*.



Cocozelle. This heirloom type of zucchini from Italy has raised ribs or stripes. The flavor is superior when the vegetable is young.



Crookneck Yellow Squash and Yellow Summer Squash. The crook is being bred out of yellow summer squash, as are the warts that make the skin bumpy. Most yellow summer squash is straight and smooth-skinned, but the older, bumpy-skinned varieties may have better flavor.



Middle Eastern–Type Zucchini. These zucchinis are typically rounder than most zucchinis and pale green in color. They may be called *Lebanese*, *Egyptian*, *Cousa*, *Kuta*, or *Magda* squash. Use them in any zucchini recipe. Because of their shape, they are good for stuffing.



Pattypan. Shaped like flying saucers, these scalloped squashes are best when small, 2 to 3 inches in diameter. Their interesting shape makes them particularly appealing for slicing and grilling, roasting, or sautéing. They are also wonderful stuffed. Pattypanns come in colors ranging from cream to green. These squashes may be found under the name of *scallopini* or *cymling*.



Round Zucchini. These may be called *globe zucchini*, *Ronde de Nice*, or *apple squash*. Buy them when they are small. They are excellent stuffed.



Zephyr. A favorite among growers because it keeps well, zephyr squash looks like a smooth-skinned yellow crookneck squash half dipped in green paint. It has excellent flavor and texture.



Zucchini. The classic zucchini is a dark green cylinder with mild flavor. Golden zucchini are increasingly common.

Buying Summer Squash

Zucchini and summer squash are best when young and small. Baby squash should be about 2 to 4 inches long and weigh less than 6 ounces. Small squash are 4 to 6 inches long and weigh 7 to 11 ounces. Medium-sized squash are about 8 to 10 inches long and weigh 12 to 16 ounces. Large squash are anything above 16 ounces; these are generally best stuffed or used in dessert recipes.

When buying summer squash, look for firm specimens without gashes or dents in the skin. They can be kept in a perforated plastic bag in the refrigerator for 3 to 5 days.

Cooking Summer Squash

Summer squash is at its best when it is cooked briefly. It can be served plain or with butter or herbs, to emphasize its delicate flavor. Or it can be combined with bold flavors to make a more exciting dish. Squash cooked by using a dry-heat method — frying, grilling, roasting, or sautéing — usually has more flavor than squash cooked by steaming or boiling.

To prepare summer squash, wash it thoroughly. Trim off the blossom and stem ends. Then slice, chop, or grate as the recipe suggests.

Draining Summer Squash

Some recipes call for draining summer squash. The most effective way to do this is to slice or grate the squash and toss with salt. Set it aside for about 30 minutes. The squash will lose about one-quarter of its volume as excess moisture is released from its cells. Wring the squash dry in a clean kitchen towel, or squeeze by hand. The squash is now ready to cook with. A less effective method that can be used with grated squash is simply to wring it dry in a clean kitchen towel.

Many cooks find that salting summer squash before sautéing greatly improves its taste and texture. Other cooks are content to sauté squash without draining first. Try it both ways and see which you prefer. In this book, salting appears in sautéing recipes as an optional step, where appropriate. Salting and draining is not optional in recipes for baked goods.

Unless you are preparing squash to masquerade as apple, don't peel it; the peel is where most of the nutrition, fiber, and flavor lie.

Cooking Methods

Summer squash can be prepared by just about any cooking method. The goal is usually to bring the squash to the tender crisp stage — tender, but with some resistance to the tooth. Mushy summer squash is unappealing at best.

Baking. Baking is a slow-cooking method that can be used to combine squash with other ingredients usually producing flavor that is greater than the sum of its parts. Layer the squash with flavorful ingredients, such as onions, leeks, garlic, and tomatoes. Sprinkle with herbs and salt and pepper, and drizzle with oil or melted butter. Bake for 1 to 1½ hours at 350°F. The squash will be transformed into a tender, flavorful dish.

Squash can also be stuffed before it is baked. Steam or blanch a whole or halved squash until barely tender. Scoop out the pulp and combine it with a filling. Put the filling back into the squash shell and bake until heated through (15 to 30 minutes) at 350°F.

Blanching. Summer squash is sometimes briefly immersed in boiling water to set the color and eliminate its slightly bitter flavor. It is a good idea to blanch summer squash before adding it to salads. To blanch, immerse whole or halved baby squash, or diced, sliced, or cubed squash, for 1 to 2 minutes in boiling salted water. To stop the cooking process, immediately drain the squash and immerse in ice water, then drain and pat dry with clean kitchen towels.

Deep-Frying. Doesn't everything taste better fried? Cut the squash into rounds or strips. Salt and drain to eliminate excess moisture and pat dry. Dredge the pieces in flour or coat in a batter. Fry in oil preheated to 365°F for 2 to 3 minutes, until golden.

Grilling. Summer squash is an excellent candidate for the grill. Leave baby squash whole or halve them; cut larger squash into ¾-inch rounds or steaks. Brush with oil, vinaigrette, or salad dressing and place over a medium-hot fire. Grill until tender and grill-marked, 4 to 5 minutes per side.

What's in a Name?

The English word *squash* comes from the Narragansett word *askútasquash*, meaning “eaten when raw or green.”

Microwaving. Summer squash can be microwaved, though it does little to enhance the flavor of the squash. Allow 3 to 4 minutes per pound.

Roasting. Roasting is an excellent way to bring out the flavor of summer squash. Leave baby squash whole or halve it; cut larger squash into rounds or spears. Coat the squash with oil and roast in a 450°F oven until lightly browned, about 15 minutes. Roasted squash is delicious served with a sprinkling of coarse sea salt or a drizzle of balsamic vinegar.

Sautéing and Stir-Frying. A very flavorful way to cook squash is to sauté or stir-fry it in butter or oil. If the squash is salted and drained first, it will brown better and the flavor will be somewhat enhanced. Melt the butter or heat the oil in a large skillet or wok over medium to medium-high heat. Add the squash and cook, stirring frequently, until the squash is tender crisp, about 5 minutes. Do not cover the pan while the squash is cooking. Do not overcrowd the pan, or the squash will steam rather than brown.

Steaming. Steam whole or halved baby squash or diced, sliced, or cubed squash over boiling water just until tender crisp, 4 to 5 minutes. Because steaming does not enhance the flavor of squash, a pat of butter, a sprinkling of herbs, or a sauce is often a welcome addition.

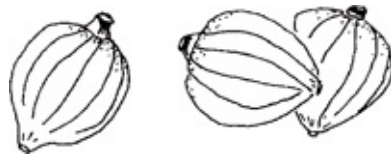
Sweating. A flavorful way to cook squash is to sauté it in butter or olive oil for 1 to 2 minutes. Cover and let the squash “sweat” out its juices for another 3 to 5 minutes, creating a delicate sauce. Sweating works especially well for sliced, diced, and cubed summer squash.

Winter Squash and Pumpkins

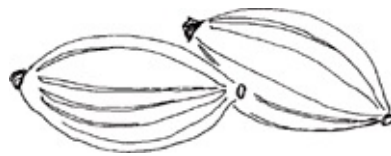
Whereas summer squash is briefly cooked, most cooking methods for winter squash are long and slow. Most winter squash varieties have inedible skins, but the seeds can often be toasted and eaten out of hand or used to garnish.

Winter Squash Varieties

Winter squash varieties differ greatly in size, flavor, and texture. Although most varieties can be used interchangeably, some squash require special preparation.



Acorn. Shaped like an acorn, this squash comes in green, orange, or white. Its flesh is somewhat dried and stringier than that of other varieties. Acorn squash is a convenient size for stuffing and for serving as baked or roasted wedges.



Banana. A monster of a squash, this can grow up to 100 pounds. It has mild, sweet, and very creamy pink flesh. Banana squash is more commonly found on the West Coast than in the eastern states. When banana squash shows up in the supermarket, it is usually sold in pieces.



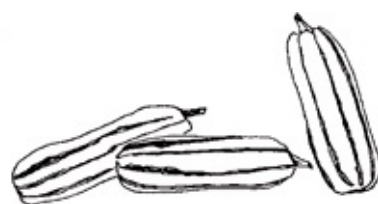
Buttercup. Fans of buttercup squash claim that it is so naturally sweet, it doesn't need a sweet glaze (Take that advice with a grain of salt.) It is dark green, with a round shape and a pale green “cap.”



Butternut. The one winter squash that can be peeled easily, butternut squash has moist, rich, smooth flesh. It makes a delicious purée, and cubes and slices can be grilled or roasted. Butternut squash can be grated raw and used as a stand-in for grated carrots in baked dishes. This good all-purpose squash is usually available year-round.



Calabaza. Caribbean recipes that call for “pumpkin” are actually referring to the calabaza. This squash is usually rounded or pear-shaped and fairly large, with mottled skin that may be green, orange, amber, or cream, and speckled or striped. It is one “winter squash” that is grown year-round in warm climates.



Delicata. Also known as *sweet potato squash*, delicata is shaped like a long, ridged tube and has cream, orange, and green stripes. Delicata should be sliced in half lengthwise, seeded, and cut into crescent-shaped pieces. The peel is edible. One delicata squash serves two.



Hubbard. Hubbard squash presents a grand challenge in the kitchen. It can weigh anywhere from 8 to 40 pounds, and its skin is extremely hard to cut through. But once the squash is wrestled into manageable pieces, its light orange flesh is sweet and moist. Hubbard squash makes excellent baby food.

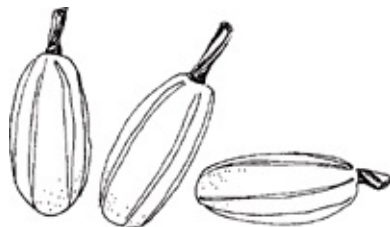


Pumpkin. Pie pumpkins, also known as “sweet” pumpkins or “cheese” pumpkins, are smaller than those cultivated for jack-o’-lanterns. They can be cooked like any other winter squash.



Red Kuri. You can recognize red kuri by its distinctive brilliant deep orange color. Its flesh is bland

compared with that of other winter squash, but its color makes it very attractive on the plate. Red kuri is often used to make soup.



Spaghetti. Yellow and football-shaped, spaghetti squash has taken the distressing tendency of winter squash to be stringy and turned it into a virtue. When cooked, the flesh of the spaghetti squash turns into long, spaghetti-like strands. Although many suggest serving spaghetti squash as a pasta substitute, it is probably better to acknowledge its sweet flavor and work with it as a winter squash.



Sweet Dumpling. Small and pumpkin-shaped, sweet dumplings are cream colored with dark green stripes. Like that of delicata squash, the skin of the sweet dumpling squash is edible. The flesh is smooth, sweet, and moist. One sweet dumpling squash serves one.



Turban. As much prized for its decorative appearance as its flavor, the turban squash is indeed shaped like a turban. It can be cooked like any other winter squash. Its skin is tough and difficult to cut into.

Buying Winter Squash

When buying winter squash, look for firm, heavy fruit with no blemishes or soft spots on the skin. The stem should be intact. Store it in a paper bag in the refrigerator for up to 1 week or in a cool (50°F), airy place for up to 3 months. If you can, avoid presliced winter squash, as their color and flavor deteriorate rapidly. Because cooked winter squash freezes well, it is better to buy a large, whole squash and freeze the leftovers (that is, if you don't have to walk home from the supermarket).

Preparing Winter Squash for Cooking

Most recipes call for cutting winter squash into halves, quarters, or serving-sized pieces. This may be easier said than done. Some winter squash, such as blue Hubbard, require a heavy cleaver (or an ax) to do the job, while others, such as delicata, have skins that are easily cut or even edible. Butternut squash has a skin that is readily removed with a swivel-bladed vegetable peeler; when a recipe calls for peeled and diced squash, choose butternut. If you are faced with a winter squash you just can't saw through, the best thing to do is wrap it in a plastic grocery-store bag and drop it on a concrete floor (I've heard that is what they do at supermarkets). Another way to tame a winter squash is in the microwave. Place the whole squash in the microwave and cook on high for 2 minutes. Allow the squash to stand for several minutes, then cut in half for further cooking. After cutting the squash,

remove the fibers and seeds.

Cooking Methods

Winter squash is usually cooked until it is completely tender. You can't really overcook winter squash (unless you are serving it stuffed, in which case you want the shell to remain intact). Test with a fork through the skin. The fork should meet with little or no resistance.

Baking. Place halved squash in a baking dish, skin-side up. Add an inch or so of water or juice to the pan. Bake at 350°F for 45 to 90 minutes, depending on the size of the squash. In a recent experiment, a whole 16-pound Baby Blue Hubbard took 3 hours to bake. You can bake a winter squash whole if you have trouble cutting it into pieces; just be sure to prick the skin in several places to allow steam to escape.

If you want to serve the squash stuffed, bake the halves skin-side up for about 45 minutes. Then turn the squash skin-side down. Loosen the squash pulp with a fork and add the stuffing ingredients, or remove the squash flesh and combine it with the filling ingredients, then return it to the squash shell. Bake for another 15 minutes, until the filling is heated through.

Deep-Frying. Although not a typical preparation in the United States, the Japanese sometimes deep-fry kabocha squash in tempura batter. Cut the squash into rounds, wedges, or strips and coat with batter. Fry for 2 to 3 minutes, until golden, in oil preheated to 365°F.

Grilling. Winter squash should be steamed before it is grilled. Steam slices until tender, then brush with oil. Grill until tender and grill-marked, about 5 minutes per side.

Microwaving. Place squash pieces skin-side up in a microwave-safe container. Cover with plastic wrap. Microwave on high for 4 minutes. Turn the squash over and rotate the dish. Microwave for 4 more minutes, until the squash is fork tender. Continue to microwave, if necessary, until the squash is completely tender.

Roasting. Roasting is an excellent way to bring out the flavor of winter squash. Peel and cut into slices, dice, or cube. Coat the pieces with oil and roast at 425°F until lightly browned, 20 to 30 minutes, turning frequently. To roast halves or quarters, place them skin-side down in a roasting pan and roast at 425°F, until tender, 45 to 60 minutes; baste occasionally with butter or apple cider, if desired.

Steaming. Steam halves or pieces over boiling water, until tender (about 15 minutes, depending on the size of the pieces). Usually steaming is done in combination with another cooking method.

Growing Squash

Although squash is readily available in the supermarket year-round, there are plenty of good reasons to grow your own. First, squash is an almost foolproof garden plant, perfect for the novice gardener. The weather has to be extreme to destroy a squash plant; mere human errors of judgment are not enough. Most important, fresh, recently harvested summer squash are superior in flavor and texture to supermarket specimens.

To avoid a ridiculous embarrassment of riches (a harvest you can neither eat yourself nor give away), figure that two summer squash plants will provide sufficient zucchini, yellow summer squash

or pattypan to satisfy a household of four. Four winter squash plants will provide enough for four people for most of the year. ~~There are more than four seeds in a packet, so plan to share the seeds with a friend.~~ Or buy the right number of plants already started at a nursery.

Most summer squash are “bush” types, meaning that the plant has a fairly compact shape. Summer squash will start producing young fruit in 45 to 55 days and will keep producing until the first frost, as long as they are harvested frequently. Winter squash, along with pumpkins and edible gourds, must reach maturity before the flesh is at its prime and require a huge amount of garden space for 75 to 120 days.

Most winter squash are “vining” plants. Unless a seed packet or catalog specifically identifies a winter squash as a bush type, the plant will be a space grabber. Vines may extend to 20 feet or more. If adequate garden space is a problem, vining squash can be trained to grow on a trellis or tepee. The expansive growth of vining squash can be curtailed by pinching back.

Bush types, although prolific, have less of a tendency to play octopus and overtake other planted areas of your garden. They can even be grown in containers on a sunny porch or deck. They require plenty of water and do best in the heat.

Squash Nutrition

All squash contain vitamin A, though the deep colored ones have the most. A 1-cup serving of winter squash provides more than 7,000 I.U. of vitamin A, while a cup of summer squash contributes a measly 520 I.U. But winter squash is more caloric than summer squash: 1 cup of winter squash contains about 80 calories (before you add the butter), while 1 cup of summer squash contains only 35 calories. Both squashes also contain vitamins B and C and fiber.

Harvesting

Zucchini and other summer squash hide under their foliage, where they can grow to unbelievable dimensions. Generally, the surplus of squash creates enough of a problem without having to deal with monster specimens. Small summer squash are preferable to those that have been allowed to grow until they are beyond their peak in size. Large summer squash are seedy, tough-skinned, and well past their peak of flavor or texture.

Winter squash must be allowed to reach maturity before they are harvested. At that point, their thick, tough skin makes them ideal for winter storage. Winter squash sweeten with age as the starches turn to sugars. If picked before reaching their prime, the squash will be watery and less flavorful.

After harvest, winter squash should be allowed to cure at room temperature for a couple of weeks to harden the skin. They should be stored in a cool airy space; 50°F is the ideal temperature for storage. Winter squash will keep for several months at this temperature. Should you be the beneficiary of an overly bountiful harvest, the preserving ideas in [chapter 9](#) will help.

2. Starters, Salads & Soups

Sometimes I think every good meal begins with squash. The recipes collected here — little dishes, salads, and soups — can make a meal or be served as a first course.

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Zesto Bruschetta

Pesto plus zucchini makes “zesto” to top these delicious toasts. Serve them as an hors d’oeuvre, an accompaniment to soup, or just as they are for a light lunch.

10 slices of baguette or 5 slices of Italian bread, halved

1 clove of garlic, cut in half

1 cup grated zucchini or other summer squash

½ cup pesto ([page 27](#))

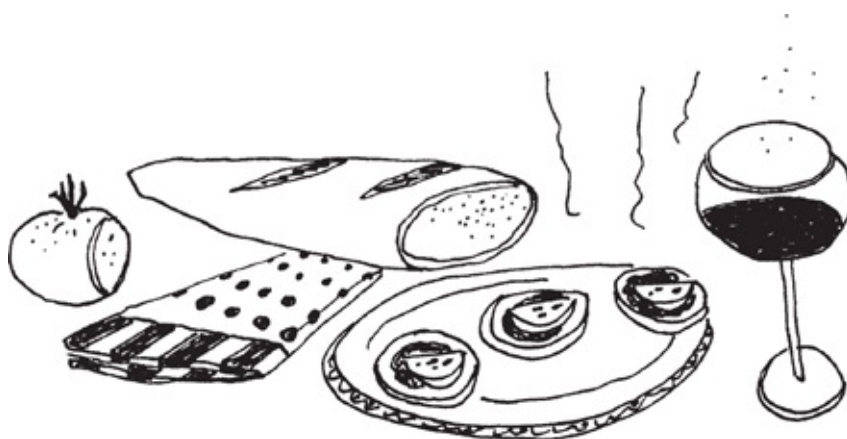
10 tomato slices

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

⅓ cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

1. Preheat the broiler.
2. Arrange the bread on a baking sheet. Toast under the broiler until golden, 2 to 3 minutes per side.
3. Rub the cut halves of the garlic clove on the toasted bread.
4. Mix together the zucchini and pesto. Cover each toast slice with a heaping tablespoon of the pesto. Broil for 1 minute.
5. Top each toast with one tomato slice. Sprinkle the tomato slices with salt and pepper. Sprinkle the cheese over the toasts.
6. Return the baking sheet to the broiler and broil just long enough to melt the cheese, 1 to 2 minutes.
7. Bruschetta is best served immediately, but it holds up well on a buffet table.

Serves 5–10



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