

Eat Butternut Squash!

Butternut squash is one of the most popular and widely available forms of winter squash. Varying in shape from cylindrical to half-dumbbell, its smooth tan exterior hides deliciously sweet, dense and buttery orange flesh.

The adaptability of the butternut squash is demonstrated by the wide variety of uses to which it is put in different countries. Across the globe it crops up in recipes for stews, gratins, pasta dishes, risottos, soups and curries. When baked and mashed, perhaps with a touch of nutmeg or cinnamon and a splash of cream, it makes a very appetising autumnal side dish - try it with your Sunday roast.

HISTORY - The squash has long been an established part of the diet in each of the five continents. Its exact origin is not clear but it is thought that it was eaten in the Americas over 5,000 years ago. It is known to have been cultivated by the Incas in the fifteenth century and remains a very important source of food throughout much of central and south America.

BIOLOGY - Butternut squash belongs to the *Cucurbita moschata* species. Other members of the Cucurbitaceae family include the pumpkin, cucumber and courgette. The split between winter and summer squash is primarily based on usage, rather than botanical classification. Winter squash, such as the butternut, are squash that are harvested when mature, with hard skins. Summer squash (including cucumbers and courgettes) are eaten whilst immature and usually have an edible skin and less strongly flavoured flesh.

BUYING TIP - If you can push a fingernail into the rind of a squash it is immature and will be lacking in flavour and sweetness. The rind should be firm and unbroken with a uniform matt tan or beige colouring (free from green tinges). Squash should feel heavy for their size (indicating a high moisture content - squash gradually lose water after harvesting). Bigger squash generally have a more highly developed flavour.

STORAGE TIP - Squash are amongst the longest keeping vegetables. In a cool (not refrigerator-cold), dry, well-ventilated place they can keep for three months or more. At room temperature, or in the fridge, they will deteriorate more quickly, but should be fine for at least a couple of weeks.

COOKING - Scan the code below to view the recipe for '**Spicy butterbean, chickpea & butternut squash stew**' on the seasonal recipes blog.



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