



Harmony Valley Farm

An update for our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993
Twin Cities Edition - Green Week Delivery

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Winter Squash

By Farmer Richard & Chef Bri

Autumn has officially arrived. The air is crisp, the leaves are changing, and your CSA box is no longer overflowing with the bounty of summer treasures like berries, melon, and cucumber. It is now overflowing with squash - winter squash, to be more specific.

The term "winter squash" could be used for any firm, fully mature squash that is suited to storage. Summer squashes are thin skinned, delicate, eaten while immature with small undeveloped seeds, and are easily damaged and therefore highly perishable. Winter squashes are cured to harden the skin. "Winter squash" covers a pretty broad range of vegetables, including the large, orange, roundish squashes that we know as pumpkins. But unlike the giant vegetables cheerily adorning porches and steps at this time of year, the squashes in your CSA box have been selected for taste and pleasant eatability. They are also good keepers, and of course make a beautiful display.

Why call them winter squash? It is only fall and they are ready to harvest. They must be harvested before a hard frost because temperatures below 30°F can cause damage that will result in early rotting. Our official average first frost date is September 15. If the squash still have live vines at that time, the leaves will die from that first frost, but will protect the squash under them from damage. But the second night of frost without leaf protection can be damaging, so we plan to have them harvested even before the first frost since we cannot harvest 3 acres of squash in one day. In fact, this year it took us 4 days with a crew of 7! It looks like we have 31,750 squash washed, counted, gently placed in bins and into our shade cloth covered greenhouse for curing and storage. The greenhouse is temperature controlled, maintained between 55 & 65°F and very dry, between 50 & 60% humidity.

So how do fall squash keep long enough to be called winter squash? With great difficulty! If the dreaded cucumber beetle or squash bug is present and feeding on the squash in the field, the small holes they eat will be an entry point for bacteria that feed on the squash sugars and turn them into a stinky mush with fruit flies everywhere. And it happens fast, in a matter of days. The great squash dilemma: How to keep squash into late fall or winter? Some keep well, some don't - why?

Here is what we have learned over 30 years of growing and storing squash. As is our philosophy with all of our produce, we grow

THIS WEEK'S BOX

PORCELAIN GARLIC: The deep, rich flavor of roasted garlic is a great complement to round out sweeter or earthier flavors of fall foods such as squash, spinach, carrots and other roots.

YELLOW & RED ONIONS: We are entering soup season! Remember to save yourself a few carrots, onions, and a celeriac for soup days.

POTATOES: Don't forget potato's good friend, the leek. Fried, grilled, mashed, or roasted, potatoes and leeks make a tasty duo. And of course there's always cheese.

CARROTS: Tasty in a stew, soup, or simmered with a roast.

PEPPERS:

UKRAINE: Thick fleshed and sweet, sliced Ukraine is good on a sandwich raw or roasted.

UW ROASTER: Roasted, peeled, seeded, and pureed, peppers make a bold sauce mixed with a little cream and seasoning. Serve over pasta with sausage, mushrooms, and spinach.

JALAPEÑOS: Dice jalapeños and mix into a batch of cornbread topped with cheddar cheese. Cheddar jalapeño cornbread is a great accompaniment to a hot bowl of chili!

MINI-SWEET: Stuffed with your favorite filling, such as hummus or herbed cream cheese, these little peppers make a fabulous snack or hors d'oeuvres. Sure to impress your friends!

BUTTERNUT & DELICATA SQUASH: See the newsletter article.

LEEKs: Slice into thin ribbons and fry until brown and crispy. Sprinkle over soup as a crunchy garnish right before serving.

BEAUTY HEART RADISH: Big, brightly colored radish makes beautiful slices for a salad, raw, veggie platter, or topped with cheese.

ARUGULA OR SALAD MIX: Try a cool salad topped with warm veggies, like roasted rings of delicata squash, roasted squash seeds, roasted peppers or leeks, and a spoonful of soft goat cheese or brebis.

RAINBOW CHARD: Chard's colorful, crunchy stalks need not be discarded; stripped from the leaf and chopped up, they can be cooked much like celery. Add to a stir fry or soup to get the chard's full nutritional benefit. The leaf portion can be used like any other cooking green; add closer to the end of cooking time.

BROCCOLI: How about a chunky broccoli cheese soup!

SPINACH: Tasty, vitamin-rich wilted spinach adds lovely dark green color to soups and pasta sauces. Be careful to add spinach shortly before serving time so it does not over-cook.

the healthiest plants in mineral rich, balanced soil without undue stress from insects, disease or water (too little or too much). Too much precipitation is out of our control. This year's crop was harvested after a 4-week dry period, perfect! We had no beetles or squash bugs because all the squash was at least ½ mile from any previous year's squash field, thanks to our crop rotation plan.

We must avoid punctures and scrapes during harvest and handling, since fresh squash have a thin skin and damage easily. In the field, we cut the stem as short as possible to avoid puncturing other squash in the storage bin. Then we place them on the harvest belt which carries them slowly to the harvest wagon. From the belt they go into the wash tank, containing water with periacetic acid added (hydrogen peroxide & vinegar stabilizer) to kill bacteria. Scrubbed clean of dirt, they

are gently placed in the bin where they will be stored until delivery time. But if we observe fruit flies, we have to go through the bins and remove the rotting ones - a big job to sort through bins that contain hundreds of squash each!

31,750 squash works out to about 25 per CSA share. We will try to sell some of this year's squash to get closer to the 15 per share projected number for the season. We will deliver them to you as fast as room in the box allows. You have as good of storage as we do, and you get to enjoy their beauty until they are used. If a spot develops in our storage, we give them to our happy vegetarian pigs that have too much to eat already. If they are at your house when that first spot develops, cut it out and enjoy the rest. If the amount of squash in this and the next 6 or 7 upcoming boxes seems a little overwhelming, don't feel

like you have to eat them all in the week you get them!

I always select a couple of crates of perfect squash and keep them with the sweet potatoes I dug and carefully washed. I watch them and eat them at the first sign of trouble, when cutting out one little spot still yields a delicious squash and I still have a nice supply to take to my family in South Dakota for Christmas. We'll have a few tucked between the potted plants in the living room and they'll still be tasty in mid-winter, long after we have turned off the heat to the greenhouse storage. I find a certain comfort and satisfaction in knowing that my squash vigilance is not that different from what has been practiced by our ancestors and native peoples for thousands of years.

Squashes are believed to have first been cultivated in Mesoamerica between 8000 and 10,000 years ago. Though there are hundreds of winter squash varieties cultivated throughout the world, most of us are familiar with only a handful. And, ironically, though the pumpkin has become the ubiquitous symbol of autumn here in the U.S., and is the headlining star in pumpkin pies, muffins, pancakes, custards, cookies, and cheesecakes, pumpkin isn't necessarily even the best suited to baking, in terms of texture and flavor. In fact, commercially prepared pumpkin pies and canned "pumpkin" aren't made from pumpkin at all—they are usually butternut squash!

This week's box features Delicata and Butternut squashes. Over the next several weeks, you will also get to see Acorn, Festival, and Kabocha.

Delicata is elongated (shaped kind of like a cucumber) and is a pale creamy yellow with green stripes. It is relatively moist, with a lightly flavored yellow flesh. Delicata's distinguishing characteristic is its thin, tender skin: fully edible when cooked! No need to peel! Now that's fun. Its unique shape makes it well suited to stuffing, or slicing into rings and sautéing. Delicata's sugar content is highest right after harvest, so this isn't one that you will want to keep on display for months. It will keep just fine for several weeks, but over time the sugars will begin to get starchy and the squash will lose flavor.

Butternut has been an American favorite since it was introduced in 1944. It is light tan in color, and somewhat pear shaped, with sweet, dense orange flesh on the inside. Butternut has a very small seed cavity on the inside, which means more room for yummy squash! Butternut is also a good keeper. It will become sweeter if stored, and is good for 2-3 months or even longer.

Many squashes with similar properties can be used interchangeably in recipes. For instance, you can start by substituting butternut for pumpkin, if you have any pumpkin recipes you've been dying to cook. If you are looking to get beyond some of your old standby recipes, like baked squash with brown sugar and raisins, Andrea reminds us that squash is a great addition to many different ethnic dishes. Although squashes were first cultivated here in

the Americas, their seeds have traveled around the world and back. Different squash varieties are common in the cuisines of Africa, Asia, Europe and even Australia. Besides the traditional sweet preparations, many winter squashes lend themselves to a variety of savory preparations. Firmer, denser squashes that hold their shape well can be added in chunks to stir fries, soups, stews, and curries.

Starchier, denser squashes can be steamed or boiled in chunks and then peeled. For moister squashes, baking will concentrate the flavor better. Split the squash in half lengthwise with a large, heavy knife, scoop out the seeds, and place the two halves cut-side down on a cookie sheet in a 400° oven until the squash feels soft to finger pressure (about 1 hour or more, depending on size).

Most winter squashes have edible seeds, though you may find that some are more flavorful, some may be more tender, some more fibrous. So far this year we have especially enjoyed roasted festival squash seeds. To use squash seeds, first scoop out the seeds and fibers from the hollow center of the squash. Scrape well with the edge of a spoon to be sure you've collected all the stringy bits. Separate the seeds from the goop and rinse seeds well in a sieve, agitating with your fingers, to loosen any remaining fibrous goo. (Kids love this. And if you don't have any kids handy, grownups will love it too.) Seeds should be allowed to air dry, then tossed with salt and spread in a single layer on a cookie sheet and baked in a 400° oven until browned lightly, about 20 or 30 minutes. If you want to get creative, roasted squash seeds are great in a chili spice mix, or a brown sugar cinnamon mix. Use savory seeds as a snack, or soup or salad garnish. Richard likes seeds roasted with tamari – find your favorite! Cinnamon brown sugar seeds make a great topping for chocolate desserts, and of course pumpkin pie, pumpkin cheesecake, etc.

To store winter squashes, keep them in a cool, dry location, and keep an eye on them.

If the skin becomes nicked or damaged, or if the stem is knocked off, bacteria and fungus can enter the squash and begin to break it down. Squash should feel firm to the touch, and not give to pressure. If you notice one beginning to soften, it's time to cook. So display them prominently in your living or eating area, watch for signs of decay, and eat that one promptly. Watch the rest turn into true winter squash.

Butternut Squash Galette

From Gourmet, February 2009

For pastry:

- 1 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 stick cold unsalted butter, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
- 1 tablespoon chopped sage leaves
- 1/2 teaspoon fine sea salt
- 4 to 6 tablespoons ice-cold water
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten

For filling:

- 1 butternut squash, peeled, seeded, and cut into 2- by 1/4-inch slices (4 cups)
- 1/2 teaspoon fine sea salt
- 3 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 2 leeks (white and pale green parts only), thinly sliced crosswise
- 6 ounces soft mild goat cheese, crumbled

Make dough:

Pulse flour, butter, sage, and sea salt in a food processor until mixture resembles coarse meal. Drizzle ice water evenly over mixture and pulse until it just forms a ball. (Do not overwork dough, or pastry will be tough.) Gently press dough into a 5-inch disk and chill, wrapped in plastic wrap, until firm, at least 1 hour.

Make filling while dough chills:

Preheat oven to 500°F with rack in middle.

Toss squash with sea salt and 1 Tbsp oil and arrange in 1 layer in a 17-by 12-inch shallow baking pan. Roast, stirring once halfway through roasting, until golden brown on edges and undersides, 20 to 25 minutes. Remove squash from oven and reduce oven temperature to 375°F.

Meanwhile, wash leeks, then cook in remaining 2 tablespoons oil with a pinch of sea salt in a 10-inch heavy skillet over medium heat, partially covered, stirring occasionally, until tender, 10 to 15 minutes. Transfer to a large bowl to cool slightly. Add squash, goat cheese, and 1/4 teaspoon pepper and toss gently.

Make galette:

Roll out dough into a 13-inch round on a lightly floured surface with a lightly floured rolling pin. Transfer to a baking sheet. Arrange filling in an even layer in center of dough, leaving a 2- to 3-inch border. Fold dough in on itself to cover outer rim of filling, pleating dough as necessary. Brush pastry with beaten egg and bake galette until crust is cooked through and golden on edges, 35 to 45 minutes. Cool on baking sheet on a rack 10 minutes before serving.

Serves 6 as a main course or 8 as a side dish.