

# 7 Winter Squashes Too Good to Overlook

By Brette Sember | October 1, 2015 | 9:00am

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Pumpkin, pumpkin, pumpkin. It's everywhere at this time of year: in your coffee, in your muffin, in your soup...and let's not even talk about pie. If you're feeling a little deluged by pumpkin, check its cousins—some of the many *other* winter squashes in the markets right now. Steamed, roasted, or cubed and simmered, they add novelty to your plate. Each variety has its own character, from texture to flavor to color. Familiarizing yourself with them will inspire you to feature more winter squash in your cooking while they are plentiful, inexpensive, and stunning in their diversity.

## Delicata Squash

The name of this squash reflects its nature; it's tender and delicate. The yellow and green stripes conceal a soft, dark yellow center. And with its edible skin, you don't even need to peel it. Cut it in half the long way, scoop out the seeds, and roast with garlic and olive oil or stuff it with cooked sausage and quinoa. Or seed, slice, and roast it with mushrooms and sage or with chicken thighs and a maple glaze. Delicata can also be quickly sautéed. Try it with kale and balsamic vinegar.

## Buttercup Squash

You'll recognize this guy by his distinctive bumpy bottom, sometimes so large it's called a turban. Oddly enough, the buttercup smells like a cucumber and the orange flesh is quite dry once cooked. Because of this, it works best with a lot of moisture: puréed with apple and curry in a soup, mashed with garlic oil and Parmesan cheese, or as a substitute in your favorite sweet potato casserole recipe.

## Butternut Squash

Butternuts are tan, tall, and shapely with an orange flesh that can be peeled, cubed, and roasted then added to salads or risotto (add some pancetta, thyme, and chunks of fontina), served with caramelized onion and pecans, or pureed with roasted pears into soup. It's also a surprisingly good stir-in to chili. Look for butternut squash that have a long neck and a smaller bulb end, because you'll get more flesh out of them. Increasingly popular in recipes, butternut squash are also often available peeled and diced in recipe-ready form in many produce sections, but you'll pay a premium for the convenience.

## Acorn Squash

Aptly named, the acorn squash looks like a big green acorn. It's best served roasted, after being cut in half and seeded. Its deep pockets make it perfect for stuffings, and since it's one of the more bland winter squash, it plays nice with nearly any flavor combination, sweet or savory. Though the classic version with butter and brown sugar is simple, this squash has so many more hats it can wear. Stuff it with chopped apples, pecans, and cinnamon. Mix cooked rice with some chopped ham and a bit of Dijon mustard for a more savory option. Use black beans, diced tomatoes, chili powder, and queso for a Southwestern flavor.

## Hubbard Squash

If you think of old Mother Hubbard of nursery rhyme fame, you'll have the right vibe for the appearance of this squash. It's bluish gray, big, lumpy, and looks as if it hasn't aged well at all. Its orange flesh is tasty (and commonly used in—surprise—canned pumpkin) and works well pureed in a soup (try apple and ginger with it), pie (add a pecan topping or some maple cream), or casserole (mix it with shredded carrot, yogurt, cinnamon, and raisins). It can stand in for butternut squash in many recipes.

## Kabocha Squash

This is also called a Japanese pumpkin and has a green skin and pumpkin shape. It is sweeter than pumpkin with more of a sweet potato taste and a dense, starchy flesh—great news for those who can't decide if they like pumpkin or sweet potato pie better. For a unique approach, seed, slice, and roast with miso, soy sauce, ginger, sesame oil, and rice vinegar. It's also a great addition cubed and simmered in your next Thai or Indian curry.

## Spaghetti Squash

Halve these yellow ovals and seed them, then cook upside down in a shallow dish of water, covered with plastic wrap, in the microwave. When the squash is tender, shred the inside with a fork and strands just like spaghetti will pull off. Spaghetti squash has very little flavor of its own, so however you prepare it, but sure to pair it with a highly seasoned sauce or topping—the spaghetti squash is a supporting player. You can use it as a substitute for spaghetti in almost any dish (carbonara, Cincinnati spaghetti, pesto, Alfredo, marinara, and more) or enjoy it simply with butter, lemon, and capers.

*Brette Sember is the author of [The Gluten-Free Guide to Travel](#) and [The Original Muffin Tin Cookbook](#). Her website is [www.BretteSember.com](http://www.BretteSember.com).*