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## SPIRIT OF THE SQUASH

It is late summer, a time when kitchen counters and produce baskets overflow with many varieties of tender summer squash. While it may be tempting to take our squashes for granted and push them to the back of the produce drawer, let me encourage you to take a fresh look at this important food and inspire you to get to know the “spirit of the squash.”

Archeological findings confirm that squash has been a part of Native American culture for thousands of years. Originating in the Americas, the earliest fossil evidence for squash domestication dates to 10,000 years ago in Southern Mexico and Northern Central America. In our region of Eastern North America, evidence for squash cultivation dates to 5,000 years ago.

Revered in Native American culture, squash is one of the crops in the Three Sisters Planting along with corn and beans. In addition to providing nutritious food, Three Sisters plantings are examples of symbiotic companion gardening techniques. In Three Sisters gardens each plant has its place and purpose in the growth cycle, providing harmonious conditions for nourishment of the plants and soil.

Three Sisters plantings are one example of growing techniques that Indigenous people use to maintain food sovereignty, thus ensuring survival and growth of their population in harmony with the land. It is in this spirit that Native Americans shared squash and other seeds with early European settlers, providing them food and resources necessary for survival. Eventually these seeds were transported to other continents and planted in gardens all over the world. Today there are hundreds of squash varieties grown worldwide, many of which are imported for the United States market.

Recognizing the importance of preserving traditional Indigenous food ways and traditions in promoting health and wellness of Native Americans, the USDA’s Office of Tribal Relations created the [Indigenous Food Sovereignty Initiative](#). In cooperation with Native American Tribal leaders and groups, this initiative promotes Tribal seed saving and sharing of heirloom seeds and plants, sustainable food foraging practices, and marketing of Indigenous and Native-produced foods. You can help these efforts by growing and purchasing heirloom squash varieties, and recognizing the true “spirit of the squash” that lives in every seed.

Whether your favorite is a straight or crook-necked yellow squash, green or yellow zucchini, or the scalloped patty pan, these members of the *Curcubita pepo* species are quick and easy to prepare as part of your summer menu. Choose smaller immature fruits with shiny skin for the

mildest flavor. If you are lucky enough to encounter a squash blossom, these are beautiful edible additions to any dish.

To help you enjoy some of your summer squash, try the recipes below:

### **RAW SUMMER SQUASH RIBBONS**

2-3 medium yellow squash or zucchini  
Favorite vinaigrette  
Salt and pepper to taste

Prepare squash using a vegetable peeler, mandolin, or spiralizer to create thin ribbons or noodles. Or, simply cut squash into 1/4 inch thick slices. Put squash in a colander for 10 minutes with a sprinkle of salt to release some moisture. Pat dry with paper towels and place in a bowl. Toss with your favorite vinaigrette dressing or a bit of olive oil and squeeze of lemon. Add salt and pepper, if desired. Enjoy.

### **SWEET STEWED YELLOW SQUASH**

4-6 small yellow squash  
1 tablespoon olive oil  
1 1/2 cups water  
2 tablespoons butter  
Pinch of salt and pepper

Slice squash into 1/2 inch rounds. Heat a large sauté pan over medium heat. Add olive oil and sauté squash for five minutes. Add enough water to halfway cover the squash, then cover with lid. Cook squash over medium-low heat for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove cover and begin to breakdown the squash using a spatula or potato masher. Replace cover and cook another 10 minutes, mashing squash occasionally. After 20 minutes, remove cover and add butter and seasonings to your stewed squash. Allow to cook 10 more minutes to concentrate juices and enhance the natural sweetness of summer squash. Adjust seasonings, adding more butter, salt and pepper, if desired. Enjoy.

### **PAMELA'S ZUCCHINI LASAGNA**

2-4 medium zucchini  
2 carrots (optional)  
1 tomato (optional)  
1 tablespoon olive oil  
1 tablespoon Italian seasoning blend  
Pinch of salt and pepper  
2 cups of Italian-style red sauce  
2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese

## **PAMELA'S ZUCCHINI LASAGNA (continued)**

Slice zucchini and other vegetables 1/2 inch thick. Toss zucchini and carrot with olive oil, 1/2 tablespoon Italian seasoning, and pinch of salt and pepper. Place zucchini and carrot under a hot broiler for 7-8 minutes until just beginning to soften. In your casserole dish, add 1/4 cup red sauce to the bottom. Layer with broiled zucchini and other veggies, then top with 1/2 cup red sauce, 1/2 cup cheese, and 1/4 teaspoon Italian seasoning. Continue layering until all vegetables have been used, finishing with sauce. Cover with foil and bake at 350°F for 40 minutes. You can also freeze the covered lasagna to eat later. Cook frozen lasagna covered at 350°F for 70 - 90 minutes. Enjoy.

## **EASY GRILLED SUMMER SQUASH**

4 medium yellow squash, zucchini, or patty pan squash  
2 tablespoons olive oil or favorite vinaigrette dressing  
Pinch of salt and pepper

Prepare squash by cutting into quarters, halves, or wedges. You want slices large enough so they will not fall through the grill rack. Toss with your favorite vinaigrette dressing or olive oil. Let squash absorb dressing for 10 minutes then place on hot grill. Turn frequently to prevent charring. Grill about 10 minutes depending on your desired tenderness. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Enjoy.

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