

News Article for Week of: July 14, 2011

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Fresh Summer Squash

Yum! It's time for fresh summer squash! These colorful, delicious vegetables are staples in Kentucky gardens and at local farmers markets. Their versatility makes them easy to prepare for tasty summer meals and side dishes. Two of the more popular varieties include yellow squash and zucchini.

Squash are fleshy vegetables protected by a hard rind. They belong to the plant family that includes melons and cucumbers. The skin and rind of summer squash are rich in nutrient beta-carotene, but the fleshy portion of this vegetable is not. To gain the full nutritional benefits of this vegetable, the skins or rinds must be eaten.

Squash has been a staple for Native Americans for more than 5000 years, and was a mainstay for early Europeans who settled in American. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson were enthusiastic squash growers. In the 19th century, merchant seamen returned from other parts of the Americas with many new varieties. This resulted in the various colors, shapes, and sizes available today.

Even though some varieties grown on vines while others grow on bushes, squash are commonly divided into two groups, summer and winter. There are several types of summer squash, but zucchini is the most popular summer squash purchased in the United States. The different varieties of summer squash are inter-changeable in most recipes, because most are similar in texture and flavor.

Choose squash that are firm and fairly heavy for their size, otherwise they may be dry and cottony inside. Look for squash that have bright, glossy exteriors. Avoid buying squash that have nicks or bruises on their skins or ones that have soft spots.

Place summer squash in plastic bags and store in the refrigerator. Fresh summer squash should keep for up to a week. Thicker-skinned varieties will stay fresh for two weeks or longer.

There's nothing more Southern than a favorite Squash Casserole! Try this variation from the "Plate It Up", Kentucky Proud recipe:

Colorful Summer Squash Casserole

4 cups sliced summer squash (mix yellow and zucchini for lots of color)!

1 medium onion, sliced

½ cup diced red bell pepper

1 cup fat free sour cream

1 – 10 ¾ ounce can reduced fat cream of chicken soup

1 ½ cups dry corn bread stuffing mix

½ cup melted margarine

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Steam the summer squash, onion, and red bell pepper until slightly tender.

Combine sour cream and cream of chicken soup.

Add steamed vegetables to soup mixture and toss to coat.

Combine corn bread stuffing mix and melted margarine

Place half the stuffing mixture; top with remaining stuffing mix

Add vegetable mixture; top with remaining stuffing mix

Bake for 45 minutes or until mixture bubbles

Yield: 8 ½ cup servings

Nutrition Analysis: 170 calories; 7 g fat; 1.5 g sat fat; 5 mg cholesterol; 370 mg sodium; 22 g carbohydrate, 3 g fiber; 7 g sugar; 4 g protein.

For more delicious recipes and information using "Kentucky Proud" fruits and vegetables, contact the Allen County Extension Office at 237-3146 or visit: www.kentuckyproud.com/recipes

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