

NEWS ARTICLE

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October 4, 2021

AUTUMN VEGETABLES PROVIDE GREAT FLAVOR AND NUTRITION

You can certainly tell that fall is in the air! Cooler temperatures, sounds of bands and fans at high school football games, and the arrival of pumpkins, gourds, and winter squash at the local farmers market welcome in fall! While many people use pumpkins and gourds for decorating, these vegetables are packed with nutrients that are great for us.

Winter squash, pumpkins, and carrots are all deep yellow to deep orange in color and are particularly rich in beta-carotene, which the body turns in to Vitamin A.

For foods high in beta-carotene and other carotenoids, try to choose red, orange, deep-yellow, and some dark-green leafy vegetables every day. Be aware, however, that color is a clue, not an assurance, that fruits and vegetables are good sources of beta-carotene. For example, despite their color, neither corn nor snow peas have much beta carotene-but they do supply other nutrients.

You have probably heard that Vitamin A is an essential part of a healthy diet. Vitamin A helps our eyes to adjust easily and see normally in the dark, plus it promotes the growth and health of cells and tissues throughout the body. Vitamin A also protects you from infections by keeping the skin and tissues in your mouth, stomach, intestines, respiratory, and urinary tracts healthy. It also may reduce your risk for certain cancers and other diseases of aging by working as an antioxidant in the form of carotenoids. All which are great reasons why we should have at least one serving of Vitamin A rich foods in our daily diet.

Winter squash is one group of vegetables that will help you get the amount of Vitamin A and beta-carotene that you need daily. Varieties of winter squash include acorn, buttercup, Hubbard, and butternut.

Winter squash has a slightly sweet, nutty flavor, has dark yellow or orange flesh and is an excellent source of Vitamin A. It develops a thick, hard rind and tough seeds. Unlike summer squash, winter squash must be cooked before it is eaten.

You may not be familiar with how to cook winter squash. Due to the tough rind, it is best to cook winter squash before peeling. Wash then cut squash in half and remove seeds. Cook until soft. Allow to cool before scooping out cooked flesh.

Steaming is always a healthy option. If the rind is not too hard, cut it into smaller pieces. Place in a steamer basket over boiling water and cover. Cook until soft, 25 to 40 minutes, depending on the size of the pieces.

If you choose to bake them, do so at 400 degrees for about an hour. To shorten cooking time, bake covered for 30 minutes, then remove cover for remainder of cooking time.

The quickest way to cook squash is in the microwave. Place halves or smaller pieces (if you can cut them) into a microwave-safe dish, cover with plastic wrap, and cook on high until tender. Let the squash stand, covered, 5 to 10 minutes before removing flesh.

Anyway you decide to enjoy winter squash, know that you are getting a vegetable that is high in both Vitamin A and beta-carotene. Winter squash also tastes great!

For more information on winter vegetables, contact the Howard County Extension Office at 870-845-7517 or visit our office located on the second floor of the courthouse.

***Please note correction to last week's recipe of the week. For the icing it should read – 1/4 pound butter not 1 pound. In other words, use 1 stick butter instead of 4.**

Recipe of the Week

Here is a recipe for you to try that uses two great fall foods. Apples and butternut squash!

I hope you enjoy it.

Butternut Squash and Apple Bake

2 pounds butternut squash, peeled and cut into ½ inch slices

2 baking apples, peeled and cut into ½ inch slices

½ cup brown sugar

¼ cup butter or margarine, melted

1 tablespoon flour

½ teaspoon cinnamon

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. In a 12- by 7 ½-inch baking dish, layer squash slices.

Layer apple slices on top of the squash. Mix brown sugar, butter, flour and cinnamon. Sprinkle over top of squash and apples. Cover and bake 50 minutes or until tender.