

## **PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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### Still Time for Summer Squash

Yes, we all know that Florida lives on a different calendar from the rest of the country. That's especially true when it comes to growing things. One good example right now is that while the calendar says Fall, our local growers are picking Summer squash. The harvest will usually continue the whole way through Winter and into Spring. Nothing summery about summer squash here!

Summer squash includes both yellow squash and zucchini. Whether they're picked in July or December, a 'summer squash' is one that has a soft, tender skin. Some are straight, some are curved with a 'crooked neck'. But if you can easily stick your thumbnail into it, it's a summer squash.

For many people summer squash are the ones that take over the garden and fill the refrigerator. They grow on vines like cucumber and winter squash, so they spread out and take up a lot of space. And many varieties are so prolific that there are jokes and cartoons about how to get rid of all the extras you don't need, such as sneak out at midnight and put them on doorsteps, or in the front seat of your neighbor's unlocked cars.

But summer squash are amazingly versatile. You can cook them in hundreds of different ways or eat them without cooking at all. Best of all, summer squash are very low in calories, making them great friends of anyone trying to manage their weight. A whole cup of sliced raw squash has only 18 calories. A cup of cooked squash has only

42 calories, so stock up! Along with their few calories, squash have almost no sodium and 300 to 400 mg of potassium and a little magnesium which help control blood pressure. They also have folate, a B vitamin that we're learning is very important for brain and nerve health.

They're not strongly flavored, so they can be hidden in many dishes. Remember, tricks are legal when it comes to your children's or family's health! The little bit of yellow or green skin is easy to disguise with almost any other color of food, from red tomatoes to dark chocolate.

That mild flavor means that you can add whatever spice or herb you like. If tomatoes, garlic and onions are not your favorite, try dill or curry, pepper or basil, mint or marjoram. And of course there are plenty of spice blends, Italian, Mexican, Asian or Indian on the market. Choose the country and you don't have to worry about how much of one or the other. You can simply sprinkle the seasoning on the squash as you sauté it, add it to the water when you steam it, or include it in any sauce, cream or gravy you put over the squash. If you're not into cooking, add your chosen seasoning to ranch dressing or some plain yogurt for a huge variety of dips. No need to measure, just add a bit, taste it and add some more until you're happy with it.

Another good thing about summer squash is that it can be frozen. To hold the fresh flavor better it is a good idea to blanch it first. Slice the squash ½ inch thick. Dip in boiling water for 3 minutes, then transfer to ice water to chill. Drain and pack in freezer bags or containers and freeze. It will be ready for casseroles or soups for months. If you want grated zucchini or squash for baking, it should be steamed for 1-2 minutes after it's grated. Blanch just a small amount at a time, and just until it turns

translucent. Pack it in the freezer bags or containers while it's warm, then dip the containers in ice water to chill before they go into the freezer. Be sure to leave at least half an inch of space at the top of the bag or container for expansion as it freezes. If the zucchini is very watery when you thaw it, drain or squeeze out most of the liquid before you add it to your recipe.

Here's a super simple recipe for yellow squash, but you could use zucchini too. Add another seasoning if you don't care for dill.

#### Easy Creamy Summer Squash

2 lbs small yellow squash

2 Tbsp margarine or oil

1 onion, sliced

1 cup plain greek-style yogurt or light sour cream

2 tsp dill weed or other seasoning

Wash squash and slice in ½ inch slices. Heat oil or margarine in skillet, add onion and sauté about 5 minutes until soft. Add squash and continue cooking until it is lightly browned. Add dill and yogurt or sour cream, reduce heat to simmer and cook until squash is tender. Serves 4.