



WINTER SQUASH TALKING POINTS

2. A Taste of Squash History

- Squash are one of the **oldest cultivated crops in the Western Hemisphere**. Seeds found in Mexico have been dated as 10,000 years old.
- Squash were originally cultivated for their **seeds**, as early varieties did not contain much flesh and were very bitter.
- Squash were one of the “Three Sisters” planted by the Iroquois. The Iroquois myth describes three sisters that were inseparable. These plants: squash, maize (corn), and beans were staples of many Native American tribes. The bushy squash plants with large leaves would prevent weeds, and the corn would provide a trellis for the bean plants to climb.
- Winter squash are **native to the Americas**. Winter Squash **first migrated to Europe from Peru by Spanish Explorer Francisco Pizarro in the early 16th century**. Many Europeans referred to squash as “melons.”
- Winter squash became a staple food of early colonists.
- Gourds, cucumbers, and melons are all part of the Cucurbit family, but all have different origins. Squash and pumpkins are native to the Americas, while cucumbers originated in eastern Asia, and melons in Africa or Persia.

3. & 4. How does winter squash grow?

- Winter squash grows on vines that sprawl out across the ground, or up a trellis.
- There are male and females flowers on each plant. The male flowers must **pollinate** the female flowers **in order for a squash crop to grow**. Without pollination, a squash will not develop. **Beetles, bees ants, and other insects are the main pollinators**.
- Squash plants grow well in soil that is loose and high in nutrient content from compost. The loose soil helps the roots to grow further into the ground.
- In South Dakota, most winter squash can be planted in the garden in late May.

5. What season do we pick winter squash?

- Winter squash is harvested many places year-round. In most warm places, harvesting occurs in late winter to early spring and then again in the fall. In Pierre, winter squash are usually harvested throughout the fall, although sometimes in very late summer.
- Winter squash are picked when fully ripe and feature a hard shell (rind) with thick, inedible skin and hollow seed cavity with fully developed seeds. **The thick shell allows it to be stored for several months, during the winter months, which is why it is called winter squash**.

5. Why should we eat Winter Squash?

- A ½ cup of cooked winter squash provides:
 - An excellent source of vitamin A (butternut, hubbard, and pumpkin).

- A good source of vitamin C (acorn, butternut, hubbard, and pumpkin).
- A good source of fiber (acorn, butternut, and hubbard).
- A good source of potassium (acorn and hubbard).
- A good source of magnesium, thiamin, and vitamin B₆ (acorn).
- A source of iron (acorn).

What is Iron?

- **Iron** is a mineral that **helps move oxygen from the lungs to the rest of the body**. It also helps keep red blood cells healthy and helps the body fight infections. When iron levels are low, you may feel fatigued, weak, and have difficulty tolerating extreme temperatures.

6. How do you pick a good Winter Squash?

- Squash are members of the gourd family. **Winter squash have hard shells, inedible skins, and large seeds.**
- Choose squash that are **firm, heavy for their size**, and have **dull skins** (not shiny). Winter squash should be hard **without cracks or soft spots**.
- Store uncut winter squash in a dark, cool, dry place. They can keep up to three months.
- Once cut, squash can keep about one week when wrapped and refrigerated.
- The most common varieties of winter squash grown in the United States include the following:
 - **Acorn**, a smaller, acorn-shaped squash with dark green skin, deep furrows, and yellow-orange flesh.
 - **Butternut**, a long, pear-shaped squash with tan skin and orange, sweet flesh; the most popular variety.
 - **Buttercup** or **Turban**, named for its “wrapped” layers, usually a dark green shell with orange, mealy flesh.
 - **Hubbard**, a golden or green squash notable for its bumpy, thick skin.
 - **Spaghetti**, a yellow-skinned squash whose flesh forms translucent spaghetti-like strands when cooked.

DID YOU KNOW...

- Squash originated in Mexico or Central America and belong to a family of gourds along with cucumbers and melons.
- The Iroquois planted the “three sisters.” Squash, maize, and beans were the staples of nearly every Native American Tribe.
- The word “squash”, in a Rhode Island Native American language means “eaten raw” however, most winter squash is eaten cooked and rarely eaten raw.
- One cup of cooked butternut squash contains 214% of the daily value for Vitamin A. It’s also an excellent source of Vitamin C and a good source of potassium.
- There are two main squash varieties: winter and summer.
- Pumpkin is a type of winter squash.

<https://www.ufseeds.com/learning/planting-schedules/south-dakota-vegetable-planting-calendar/>