Summer Squash

Summer squashes are fleshy vegetables protected by a tender rind. They belong to the plant family that includes melons and cucumbers. The skin and rind of summer squash is rich in the 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 should be eaten. Summer squash can be used in many easy, versatile recipes as main dishes and side dishes. Squash can be eaten baked, boiled, broiled, pan-fried, steamed and much more. With the many varieties of summer squash, they are all interchangeable in most recipes, because they are similar in texture and flavor. Squashes are low in calories, yet high in fiber and vitamin C. Summer squash is a healthy vegetable to add to your diet. It is generally low in cost, June through mid-October, when readily available in Kentucky. Buying Kentucky Proud is easy. Look for the label at your grocery store, farmers market or roadside stand and bring the freshest locally grown produce home to your family. Even though some varieties grow on vines, while others grow on bushes, squashes are commonly divided into the two groups — summer and winter. Summer squash come in many different colors and shapes. Popular summer squash varieties include crookneck, yellow straight neck, Cocozelle, patty pan, and zucchini. The most common and an American favorite is the green zucchini squash. The different varieties of squash can be used in most recipes. Most squashes are similar in texture and flavor. Try a new summer squash and see what your family prefers.

How to Select

When shopping for clean squash that are blemish free, firm, and have a bright, glossy exterior. Choose squashes that are firm and fairly heavy for their size, otherwise they may be dry and cotty inside. As summer squashes age on the vine, they will develop a tough dull skin, so look for young, small, tender squash. Also avoid buying squashes that are nicked or those with bruises or soft spots.

Storage

Place summer squash in plastic bags and store in the refrigerator. Fresh summer squash should keep for up to a week, but is best when used within 2 to 3 days. Thicker-skinned varieties will stay fresh for two weeks or more.

How to Grow

Be even more summer squash savvy and grow your own plants. Summer squash can be started from seed and will take about 55 days to mature, when planted directly in the soil. A quicker way is to use a transplant which you start at home or purchase. Transplants will mature in about 45 days depending on the environmental conditions. Do not plant squash in the garden until the last average frost date for your area. In Kentucky this is April 30 for West Kentucky, May 5 for Central Kentucky and May 10 for East Kentucky.

Presentation Plan

Grocery list:
• A variety of summer squashes for recipe and display (5-6 squash total)
• 1 red bell pepper
• 1 yellow bell pepper
• 1 sweet onion
• 2 large tomatoes
• 3-4 garlic cloves
• 2 tablespoons dried Italian seasoning
• 1 (8 ounce) can tomato sauce
• 1 cup whole grain rotini pasta, uncooked
• Nonstick cooking spray
• ½ pounds boneless skinless chicken breast
• ¼ cup shredded Parmesan cheese
• Salt and pepper to taste
• Fresh basil for garnish
• Fresh oregano for garnish

Equipment needs:
• Stove top
• Cutting board
• Chef knife
• Paring knife
• Large skillet
• Medium saucepan
• Medium bowl
• Clear bowls to display cut and/or measured ingredients
• Can opener
• Dry measuring cups
• Measuring spoons
• Rubber spatula

Display preparation:
• Chop bell peppers, onions, garlic and tomatoes for recipe preparation and place in clear bowls. Slice zucchini and/or yellow squash crosswise into ¼ inch pieces and place in clear bowls for recipe preparation. Reserve at least one of each summer squash being used for demonstration and information sharing.
• Cook pasta according to package directions.
• Cut chicken into bite size pieces. Go ahead and cook chicken by spraying large nonstick skillet with cooking spray; heat over medium heat. Add chicken; cook 6 minutes or until no longer pink, stirring occasionally. Place chicken in clear bowl.
• Depending on time available, you might want to prepare a dish ahead and have ready for sampling after the demonstration.

Substitution: Use fresh herbs instead of dried Italian seasoning when available. For this recipe use 3 tablespoons fresh oregano and 3 tablespoons fresh basil. When using fresh herbs, remove leaves from stems and discard stems. Stack leafy herbs. Roll into a tight roll and finely chop.

Demonstration steps:
1. Discuss focus commodities and talking points.
2. Talk about the substitution of dried versus fresh herbs. Demonstrate and discuss using fresh herbs instead of dried when available. If time and money allows, show how to chop fresh herbs. (When using fresh herbs first remove leaves from stems and discard stems. Stack leafy herbs. Roll leaves into a tight roll and finely chop.)
3. Prepare recipe by assembling the ingredients in a skillet. Discuss the function of the ingredients to the success of the final product.
4. Talk about the variety of ingredient colors in the recipe and how important it is to include color in meals.
5. Talk about this recipe being a “one dish skillet” meal and how it’s not a traditional “boxed” skillet helper dinner meal.
6. Transfer the finished product to a serving platter or bowl. Garnish.
7. Discuss other items you could serve to complete the meal. Suggestions could include a roll and/or side salad.
Italian Chicken Summer Squash Skillet

1 red bell pepper, diced  
1 yellow bell pepper, diced  
1 sweet onion, diced  
2 large tomatoes, diced  
3-4 garlic cloves, finely diced  
3 medium summer squash, sliced crosswise  
1 cup whole grain rotini pasta, uncooked

1 ¼ pounds boneless skinless chicken breast  
Nonstick cooking spray  
1 (8-ounce) can tomato sauce  
2 tablespoons dried Italian seasoning  
½ cup shredded Parmesan cheese  
Salt and pepper, to taste

Slice squash into ¼ inch pieces. Combine all vegetables, with garlic in a bowl. Set aside. Cook pasta according to package directions. Cut chicken into bite size pieces. Spray large nonstick skillet with cooking spray; heat to medium. Add chicken; cook 6 minutes or until no longer pink, stirring occasionally. Add vegetable mixture to the skillet. Add tomato sauce and dried Italian seasoning. Stir well. Increase heat, cover and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium; cook 10 minutes or until summer squash is tender, stirring occasionally. Stir cooked pasta into chicken/vegetable mixture. Sprinkle with cheese. Season as needed.

Yield: 8 servings

Nutritional Analysis: 200 calories, 4.5 g fat, 2 g saturated fat, 50 mg cholesterol, 300 mg sodium, 19 g carbohydrate, 3 g fiber, 8 g sugars, 20 g protein.

Sources:  
- www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov  
- Publication - ID-128 Home Vegetable Gardening in Kentucky, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Kentucky, College of Agriculture.  
- http://www2.ca.uky.edu/hes/fcs/factshts/KY_Recipe_Cards_52.pdf

For more delicious recipes and information using “Kentucky Proud” fruits and vegetables, contact your local Cooperative Extension Service or visit: www.kentuckyproud.com.

June 2014

Plate it up! Kentucky Proud Project

Lara Savage, Monroe County Extension Agent for Family and Consumer Sciences  
County Extension Agents for Family and Consumer Sciences  
University of Kentucky, Dietetics and Human Nutrition students

Copyright © 2014 for materials developed by University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension. This publication may be reproduced in portions or its entirety for educational or nonprofit purposes only. Permitted users shall give credit to the author(s) and include this copyright notice. Educational programs of Kentucky Cooperative Extension serve all people regardless of race, color, age, sex, religion, disability or national origin.