About – Summer squash refers to the soft squash varieties that are members of the Cucurbitaceae family of vegetables. Originating in Mexico and Guatemala, they are closely related to both cucumbers and melons. Like many vegetables native to the New World, early explorers brought these delicate vegetables back with them and they subsequently spread to the far corners of the globe. Today, China and Japan lead the world in production with Romania, Turkey, Italy and Egypt also among the world’s largest producers of summer squash.

Unlike hard shelled winter squash, the entire squash, including its flesh, seeds and skin, is edible. Also, in contrast to winter squash, summer squash varieties are quite fragile and do not store well for long periods of time. The three principle varieties of summer squash include:

Zucchini Squash: This is by far the best known of the summer squash varieties. With a shape similar to a cucumber, its smooth skin can vary from green to dark green in color and will have stripes of speckles. Yellow varieties also exist but are not as common. The tender, slightly-sweet flesh is creamy white and contains numerous seeds. While the most desirable size for zucchini is between five and eight inches, it can easily grow to a foot or more in length.

Crook-neck or Straight-neck Yellow Squash: Similar in appearance to zucchini, its smooth skin is most often golden yellow in color, but occasionally you will find green-skinned variations. The straight-neck variety is actually genetically altered from its crook-necked cousin.

Patty Pan Squash: This small, saucer–shaped variety can be either pale green or bright yellow in color. They will vary in size from 1 to 3 inches across. The dense, cream-colored flesh is not as sweet as Zucchini.

Selection – While the name would imply seasonality, these squash are actually available all year long. When selecting summer squash, you should look for ones that have shiny, unblemished skin that is free of punctures or decay. Squash that is very small will often lack flavor and ones that are very large will be fibrous and contain tough seed. Handle them carefully as they are actually quite delicate.

Storage – Summer squash can be stored in a plastic bag in the vegetable drawer of your refrigerator for up to seven days although 4-5 days is more practical. Do not wash them before storage as excess moisture will hasten the formation of mold.

Preparation and Uses – Wash summer squash immediately prior to preparation under a stream of cool running water. Cut off both ends and then proceed to slice as directed for the particular recipe you are preparing.

Some uses for summer squash include:
- Grating zucchini or yellow squash on a garden salad.
- Sautéing summer squash in a ratatouille.
- Slicing zucchini or yellow squash for shish kabobs.
- Serving raw slices of your favorite summer squash with vegetable dip as an appetizer.
- Adding zucchini to your favorite bread recipe.

Nutrition – Summer squash is a good source of vitamin A and a very good source of vitamin C and dietary fiber. It is low in carbohydrates and calories and contains virtually no fat, cholesterol or sodium.

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