



Fresh from the Garden

SUMMER SQUASH

This lesson may be presented as a general overview of summer squash, or it may be divided into separate, more in depth, lessons.

The material is suitable for both beginning gardeners and gardeners with established productive vegetable gardens.

Use the lesson to:

- Teach about the health benefits of summer squash.
- Demonstrate how to properly harvest, store, handle, preserve, healthfully prepare, and freeze summer squash.
- Introduce new and/or unfamiliar vegetables to gardeners.
- Provide more healthful alternatives to traditional cooking techniques or recipes.
- Instruct gardeners how to deal with an overabundant crop

With minor adaptation, the lesson can be used to introduce the concept of growing vegetables at home to non-gardeners.

Key presentation points:

1. Nutrition and health benefits associated with vegetables
2. Importance of eating fruits and vegetables daily.
3. Simple cultivation recommendations
4. Harvesting techniques
5. Washing and storing
6. Healthful cooking/preparation techniques
7. Freezing techniques
8. Recipe demonstration (1 or 2)
9. Recipe

Additional (optional) points:

- History or origin
- Cultural information
- Interesting or fun facts

Additional (optional) Activities:

- Compare vegetable name in English with another language appropriate for your audience.
- Taste and compare flavor of different varieties of summer squash.
- Sample raw squash with a healthful dip.
- Test audiences' knowledge regarding the difference between a fruit and a vegetable, and into

which category selected produce falls.

- Demonstrate how summer squash may be grown in containers.
- Distribute plants or seeds for immediate planting in the garden.
- Hold a zucchini festival at your garden and prepare unusual recipes.
- For children: Have fun and make use of large, overgrown, or inedible zucchini:
 - Have a contest for the largest zucchini, the best-dressed zucchini, the best zucchini sculpture, etc.
 - Hold a zucchini relay race, boat race or a “Zucchini 500” at the garden
 - Hold a “zuke-o-lantern” carving contest

Squash Facts:

- Squash comes in summer and winter varieties.
- Summer and winter squash are both cultivated during the summer months, but winter squash is harvested as a fall crop.
- The word squash comes from the Narragansett and Iroquois words "askootasquash," and "isquoutersquash" meaning "eaten green."
- Squash was the first dish Indians taught the settlers how to cook.
- The name zucchini is Italian, a derivative of the work “sweetest.”
- August 8th is national "Sneak Some Zucchini Onto Your Neighbor's Porch Night."
- Squash belongs to the same family of plants that includes pumpkins, cucumbers, melons, and gourds.
- Some people enjoy growing “monster” size squash.

Preparation:

- Review lesson material.
- Review presentation guidelines.
- Review demonstration checklist.
- Review resources for additional presentation information or activities.
- Select seasonal vegetables for demonstration.
- Prepare vegetables for demonstrations, as necessary.
- Prepare recipes or parts of recipes for demonstration and sampling, as necessary.

The following is a suggested script with step-by-step demonstration activities:

PRESENTATION: PART 1: SUMMER SQUASH

Introduce yourself and review what you will be presenting with the audience. Discuss the recipe(s) that you will demonstrate.

“Native to Central America and Mexico, summer squash was here before Columbus. It was one of the first plants cultivated by Native Americans, and the first dish they taught the settlers to cook. Many of the present day varieties have been growing in the Americas for 5,000 years.

Note: If you plan to demonstrate 2 recipes, select 1 that requires cooking and 1 that is served raw. Start the recipe that requires cooking at the beginning of the presentation to allow adequate cooking time. The 2nd recipe may be prepared at or towards the end of the presentation.

If you have selected the Summer Veggie Sauce to be demonstrated, begin preparation at the beginning of the workshop to allow adequate cooking time.

☞ Display summer squash and zucchini of various sizes. If unavailable, display photographs

“Summer squash comes in a variety of shapes, colors, and sizes. Most summer squash are similar in flavor and may be interchanged in a recipe. Some summer squash varieties include:

Caserta: Dark yellow-green, about 8 inches long, with whitish flesh.

Chayote: Light green mango-shaped with furrowed skin. If it's young enough, you don't have to peel it. It has a big seed in the middle that's edible.

Cocozelle: Smooth, dark green zucchini look-alikes that have greenish flesh.

Courgette: British term for young zucchini.

Cymling: Also called scallop, white, pattypan, or bush squash. Small, pie-shaped, and scalloped--a little on the green side when they're young, white when older.

Vegetable marrow: British name for mature zucchini.

Yellow squash (includes straight- or crook-necked; also golden): yellow on the outside; white on the inside.

Zucchini: Dark green, shiny, and about 4-10 inches long, depending on variety and harvesting.”

☞ Display a variety of summer squash. If unavailable, display photographs

☞ Point out the color, shape and different sizes of the displayed squash or photographs

“Squash are in the same plant family as melons, cucumbers, and pumpkins.

Squash is the perfect plant for a beginning gardener. It is easy to grow and prolific. In fact, it is sometimes difficult to keep up with the supply. When space is limited, squash plants can be grown in large containers.”

☞ Display photographs of summer squash/zucchini plants growing in containers

“Unlike winter squash, summer squash are harvested at a tender immature stage, before the skin hardens and becomes tough. Zucchini should be no longer than 8". Patty pan and round varieties should be no larger than 4" in diameter. During hot weather, the fruit is usually ready to pick 4 to 8 days after flowering. Check the plants every 1 to 2 days to avoid tough over mature, giant squash.

Nutritionally speaking summer squash contains vitamins A and C, potassium and fiber. It is rich in the carotenoids lutein and zeaxanthin. These are plant elements (phytochemicals) that have been shown to reduce the risk of an age-related eye problem called macular degeneration (lutein may also reduce the risk of colon cancer).

- ☞ Define phytochemicals and discuss health benefits, if time allows (see “*Nutrition – the basics*” handout for information on phytochemicals)

“Summer squash is 95% water, and very low in calories—only 20 calories per cup.”

- ☞ Measure a 1 cup portion of sliced or chopped raw summer squash and place on a small plate
- ☞ Discuss daily vegetable recommendation (2 ½ to 3 cups)

“Store summer squash in the refrigerator crisper in a plastic bag. Fresh from the garden squash will keep for about a week or slightly longer.

Wash squash well before preparing them. Scrub gently in cold water with a soft vegetable brush.”

- ☞ Demonstrate washing technique

“Trim the ends then slice, dice, or shred squash. Do not remove skin (many of the nutrients are located here) or seeds of squash, if young and tender. Only tough, oversized squash need to be peeled and seeded before cooking.”

- ☞ Slice a young, tender squash and an over mature squash in half lengthwise
- ☞ Compare the tender versus the tough skin
- ☞ Point out the small seeds versus the large seeds

“Fresh summer squash has a very mild taste, and easily absorbs other flavors. It can be steamed, boiled, sautéed, baked, grilled or stir-fried. Use it in breads, muffins, casseroles, or soups. Serve it raw sliced in salads, with your favorite dip, add shredded squash to recipes for cake, spaghetti sauce, or meatloaf.

Very small squash can be cooked whole. Larger squash can be stuffed. Squash flowers are also edible.

Summer squash can also be made into pickles.”

- ☞ Introduce bread and butter pickle recipe
- ☞ Demonstrate recipe

- ☞ Distribute a previously prepared pickle sample
- ☞ Display squash flowers. If unavailable, display photograph

“It’s very easy to overcook squash, so be careful. Quick cooking techniques, such as sautéing, grilling and roasting, usually produce the best results.”

YIELD -

One pound equals about:

- 3 medium squash
- 3 1/2 cups raw slices
- 3 cups raw, grated squash
- 1 1/2 cups cooked squash

COOKING SUMMER SQUASH:

Wash and cut off the ends of the squash. Do not peel. Sauté, bake, microwave, steam, or stir-fry summer squash until tender. Do not overcook.

Sauté or stir-fry: Trim and slice or dice squash. Using a small amount of oil or butter, cook squash stirring frequently, until edges are lightly colored, but squash is still crisp, about 3 to 5 minutes.

Microwave: Trim and cut squash into chunks or leave whole. Cook, adding ¼ cup of water, in a covered dish for 4 to 6 minutes.

Steam: Steam whole, diced, or sliced squash for 2 to 5 minutes.

“Season squash with garlic, onion, peppers, tomatoes, herbs, or whatever you like.

Just don’t “undo” all the nutritional benefits of eating summer squash by cooking it with large amounts of fat and salt. Sauces, cheese, dressings, and other ingredients can add calories and cholesterol.”

- ☞ Introduce selected recipe or recipes
- ☞ Demonstrate recipes
- ☞ Distribute a small sample of the recipe for tasting
- ☞ Ask the audience how they like the recipe

NOTE: IF PRESENTATION IS ENDING HERE, SAY:

“Remember, for good health it is important to eat vegetables everyday, and to eat a variety. Eat at least 2 ½ to 3 cups, but more is better. The more you eat the better chance you have for a healthy life.”

- ☞ Conclude presentation
- ☞ Ask for questions
- ☞ Thank audience for participation

NOTE: IF PRESENTATION IS CONTINUING, PRESENT FREEZING MATERIAL.

PRESENTATION: PART 2: FREEZING SUMMER SQUASH

“If you find yourself with an overabundance of summer squash, freeze it.”

- ☞ Discuss a bag or container of frozen summer squash

“Squash may be frozen raw, cooked, or prepared in the recipe of your choice. Thawed squash may be used in any cooked recipe. It may not be substituted for fresh, since the freezing process causes the texture to become mushy. Also, when thawed, squash produces quite a bit of liquid.”

- ☞ Discuss thawed frozen squash
- ☞ Point out liquid and mushy texture

“The freezing process is simple:

1. Wash and trim squash
2. Shred unpeeled squash and drain in a colander
3. Pat dry with paper towels, apply pressure, gently squeeze. Remove as much moisture as possible.
4. Portion it into airtight freezer containers or bags (most bread/cake recipes call for 2 to 3 cups) and seal tightly. It will last 3-4 months.”

- ☞ Demonstrate freezing technique

“When thawed, squash produces quite a bit of liquid. Add the liquid to bread, cake, and muffin recipes, but drain it if sautéing or adding the squash to a casserole.”

- ☞ Display container of thawed squash. Point out the amount of liquid exuded.

“Frozen squash can be added to soups, stews, and sauces.

Don't "undo" all the nutritional benefits squash and other vegetables by cooking them with large amounts of fat and salt. Sauces, dressings, and other ingredients will add calories, fat, and cholesterol.

Remember, for good health it is important to eat vegetables everyday, and to eat a variety. Eat at least 2 ½ to 3 cups, but more is better. The more you eat the better chance you have

for a healthy life.

- ☞ Conclude Presentation
- ☞ Ask for questions
- ☞ Thank audience for their participation

Recipes

SUMMER VEGGIE PASTA SAUCE 4-6 servings

Make this sauce with whatever fresh vegetables you have in your garden. If it is not moist enough, add some water.

3 – 4 large tomatoes, chopped
3 cloves garlic, crushed
2 medium zucchini, chopped
1 small eggplant, chopped
1 medium green pepper, chopped
1 medium small onion, chopped
1/4—1/2 cup chopped fresh basil
2 tablespoons oil
Salt and black pepper to taste

Heat oil in a large pan over medium heat. Add onion, green pepper, and garlic. Cook for 3 to 4 minutes, stirring often.

Add the zucchini and eggplant. Cook for 5 minutes.

Add the tomatoes and basil. Simmer about 20 minutes over low heat, uncovered, until slightly thick. Add salt and pepper to taste.

**This recipe can be doubled or tripled and frozen in individual or family size servings.*

ZUCCHINI PANCAKES 3-4 servings

4 medium zucchini, grated (discard any liquid that forms)
2 eggs, beaten
1/2 small onion, minced
1/4 cup all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
Small handful fresh chopped parsley
1/4 cup grated Parmesan or other cheese
Salt and pepper to taste
2 tablespoons oil

Combine the zucchini, egg, onion, flour, baking powder, cheese, salt and pepper.

Heat the oil in a skillet over medium high heat. Drop zucchini mixture by heaping tablespoonfuls and cook for a few minutes on each side, until golden. Serve with a dollop of light sour cream or a squeeze of fresh lemon juice.

Note: A packaged baking mix, such as Bisquick, may be substituted for the flour and baking powder.

ZUCCHINI BREAD AND BUTTER PICKLES 1 quart

1 clean quart jar with a lid
3-4 medium sized zucchini
2 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon celery seeds
1 teaspoon mustard seeds
½ teaspoon turmeric (optional)
1 cup white sugar
1 cup white vinegar

Trim and slice zucchini.

Put the salt, celery seeds, mustard seeds, turmeric, and sugar in the jar.

Put the sliced zucchini (pack it tightly—it will shrink) into the jar, and pour in the vinegar.

Screw the lid onto the jar and shake it until the sugar dissolves.

Refrigerate for 5 days for pickles.

ZOODLES (ZUCCHINI NOODLES) 4-6 servings

4 medium squash
3 tablespoons olive oil
3-4 cloves garlic, minced
Salt and pepper to taste
Fresh chopped parsley or basil to taste
Grated Parmesan cheese to taste

Trim the zucchini and cut lengthwise into long thin slices. If the center has large seeds, put it aside and use it in another dish or salad. Stack the slices and cut into thin strips.

Heat the oil and cook the garlic for 1 minute. Add the zucchini ribbons and cook, stirring for 3 to 4 minutes, until crisp tender. Be careful not to overcook. Season with salt and pepper. Stir in the parsley/basil and cheese. Serve immediately.

OVEN FRIED ZUCCHINI COINS

3-4 servings

3 medium zucchini, sliced
2 eggs, beaten
2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
1/2 cup seasoned bread crumbs
salt and pepper to taste

Cut zucchini into 1/4-inch thick slices. Combine bread crumbs, cheese, salt and pepper in a small bowl.

Dip zucchini in the beaten egg then into the bread crumb mixture.

Place zucchini on a baking sheet coated with cooking spray. Bake at 475 degrees for 5 minutes; turn & bake additional 5 minutes. Serve immediately.

ZUCCHINI SLAW

6 cups

6 medium zucchini, grated
4 garlic cloves, minced
1 large carrot, grated
1 medium red bell pepper, diced
1 small onion, diced
1 stalk celery, diced
1/4 cup fresh parsley, minced
1/4 cup vinegar
1/4 cup reduced-fat or regular mayonnaise
1 tablespoon sugar or substitute
1/4 teaspoon dry mustard
Salt and pepper to taste

Mix together mayonnaise, vinegar, sugar, dry mustard, salt and pepper. Add the vegetables and toss to mix well. Cover and refrigerate to blend flavors.

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