

Welcome to Fall: Butternut Squash Soup


The first day of fall arrives Sept. 22, and the coming of the season means one thing and one thing only: It's squash time. Squash is really autumn's unsung hero, often overlooked for the apple pies and pumpkin spice lattes of the world. But I love squash because it captures the season in a way that no other food can. As light summer evenings give way to the brooding nights of fall, so do summer squash and zucchini make way for the heft and meatiness of autumn's produce.

I also love squash because it opened up the world of savory cooking to me. A few years back I was a newlywed with a degree in Pastry Arts, yet possessed no discernible savory cooking skills. Couple that imbalance with an intense fear of cooking meat, and I was lost on what to prepare for a husband who refused to be sustained on chocolate soufflés. Convinced that cooking any kind of animal protein would result in foodborne catastrophe, I turned to the fall's hearty and

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bountiful selection of squash - butternut, acorn and spaghetti. Hefty yet unthreatening, the most terrifying part about the season's squash varieties is cutting them open: These suckers are thick and heavy. The sense of danger that comes with cutting them open is totally worth it though. Not only is the squash itself delicious

and versatile, but varieties like butternut and acorn come filled with pumpkin-esque seeds, perfect for roasting into an appetizer or snack for tomorrow's lunch. This discovery, and being able to use the squash from stem to rump, ignited in me a sense of eco-conscious, frugal empowerment. I established a cyclical yet creative menu based on squash. The result was a buoyed sense of culinary, and wifely, prowess. Thank you, squash.

In honor of fall's commencement and hearty squashes officially being in season, here is the very first squash recipe that stole my heart. I actually lost the original recipe, but it's so simple and elastic that I just make it up as I go along. If you want more stew-like texture, cut back on the broth. If using a chunk of sourdough as a spoon is your style, add more broth. Top with a dollop of plain yogurt if you want a little boost of creaminess, or fried sage if you're feeling extra fancy. 



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Disclaimer: I hate using half of an ingredient when cooking. (What is someone really going to do with a leftover chunk of butternut squash, or half of a sweet potato?) For that reason I forgo measuring by weight, and just throw the whole vegetable in. Will your results be exactly the same each time using this method? No, but unless you're doing a side-by-side comparison, you'll never know the difference.

- 1 large butternut squash (about 1-2 pounds), peeled and cubed
- 1-2 sweet potatoes (one if it's a really big guy, two if on the smaller side), peeled and cubed
- 2 parsnips (medium-sized), peeled and chopped
- 1 or 2 Granny Smith apples, chopped
- 1 large white onion, chopped
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 4 cups low-sodium vegetable broth (adjust according to desired thickness)
- Salt & pepper to taste
- Nutmeg (optional, topping)
- Plain yogurt (optional, topping)

1. In a large Dutch oven over medium heat, heat the olive oil
2. Sauté the onion until soft and translucent
3. Add the butternut squash, sweet potatoes and parsnips. Stir to mix in with the onions. Sauté for 5-7 minutes, stirring occasionally to prevent burning (a little bit of color is nice, though!)
4. Add the broth, cover, and simmer until the vegetables are just tender
5. Add the apple(s) and simmer for a few more minutes - everything should be nice and tender - easily pierced with a fork
6. Add salt and pepper to taste
7. Using an immersion blender or high-powered blender, blend soup until smooth. If the soup is too thick, add more broth (water also works if you're out of broth)
8. Serve with a dollop of yogurt for added creaminess and a sprinkle of nutmeg (optional)

Bon appetit!