

# JHSPH CSA Produce Guide

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Amanda Kirkhart, Aliza Fishbein, Brent Kim

This produce guide is a compilation of produce histories, preparation and storage tips, nutrition and culinary information and recipes. Each “produce profile” was originally included as part of our weekly CSA newsletter. Some of the produce items are already established as familiar members of popular cuisine; others may be relatively new and “exotic.” We hope this guide helps you to explore the multitude of fruits and vegetables offered both through our CSA and at your local farmers’ markets and grocery stores.

A common concern expressed among CSA members is the difficulty in using all of their produce. We offer storage tips to prolong the freshness of your produce, giving you more of an opportunity to enjoy them, while the recipes are provided to help you gain new ideas for how to prepare them. The nutrition, preparation and cooking tips provide enough general information to inspire you to explore your own creativity and palate.

## Table of Contents:

Basil .....	2
Bell Peppers .....	4
Broccoli .....	6
Cabbage .....	8
Eggplant .....	10
Kohlrabi .....	12
Squash, Patty Pan.....	13
Squash, Summer .....	14
Squash, Winter.....	16
Sweet Potato Leaves .....	18
Swiss Chard .....	20
Tomatoes .....	21
Watermelon .....	22

# Basil

## History:

A member of the mint family, basil and its 40 varieties has long been in use in countries far and wide beginning with its native India. Basil was able to quickly spread great distances because of its mobility and ability to be grown indoors throughout all seasons. It can even germinate after being idle for up to ten years!

Basil's many uses were demonstrated by each of the many countries it reached. It has been found in soaps, shampoos and dental care products. Even perfumes, incenses and holistic remedies contained the herb. One of its most famous uses was in the preserving embalming methods of ancient Egypt.

Imaginably, basil has come to be a significant symbol in many cultures. In Greece it was a sign of mourning and was given the title *basilikon phuton*, meaning "the kingly herb." Hindus place basil on the dead to ensure their place in the afterlife. In British India it was revered and used by natives to swear oaths upon in court. In Italy it was a symbol of love and was placed in one's hair by suitors as a sign of romantic intentions. Romanians give sprigs of basil to symbolize engagement. Mexicans carry basil with them to try and attract their lover's wandering eyes. In other cultures a fear has developed around basil. Some believe that scorpions grow under pots of basil and that smelling the basil causes scorpions to grow in one's brain!

It is even said that Basil was found growing around Jesus' tomb after the resurrection and so the Greek Orthodox use it to prepare Holy Water.

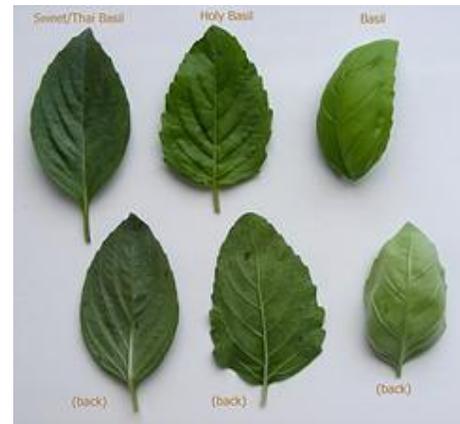
One of the more bizarre stories is that basil, having medicinal properties for soothing animal bites and stings, could cure a bite from the mythical basilisk (similar to a dragon). The animal has the head of a rooster, the body of a snake, and the wings of a bat. Basil was said to be the only cure for its bite and its noxious breath. Basil, however, could not cure one of the creature's most deadly offenses: looking one straight in the eye would be instantly fatal.

It is clear why basil is so popular. Its dynamic uses and unique aroma have given it a place in the history books. From basilisks to your everyday bowl of pasta!

## Storage:

Basil is one of those foods that does not store well in the refrigerator. I've put it in the refrigerator before and no harm came to the basil leaves, but they will often turn black in colder temperatures so it is not recommended. The best thing to do is to trim the ends and place basil leaves in a shallow glass containing an inch or so of water. Place a loose plastic bag over the leaves and place on the counter. When the water gets cloudy, replace it. Basil will last this way for seven to ten days.

Basil can also be frozen, and will last up to six months. Simply wash, dry completely, and chop. Then, once dry, place in freezer bags and freeze immediately. I've found that after freezing, the basil isn't really fit for using raw in dishes like caprese salad, but is still delicious when added to cooked meals.



## **Nutrition, Preparation, & Cooking:**

I never really thought about the nutritional benefits of herbs and spices. So you, too, may also be surprised to hear that basil has a wealth of vitamins and minerals, and adds more than delicious flavor and added complexity to your meals. Two tablespoons of chopped, fresh basil has only one calorie, and is an excellent source of vitamins A, B6, C, E, and K, protein, riboflavin, niacin, dietary fiber, folate, calcium, iron, phosphorus, magnesium, manganese, potassium, copper, and zinc. That's a lot of good stuff packed into such a tiny leaf!

Once you wash your basil, trim the stems off. From there, you can use the leaves whole, chop them, or julienne them. This sounds like a fancy technique, but is really easy to do and adds an elegant touch to any meal. Stack some basil leaves together, and roll lengthwise as tightly as possible. Then slice crosswise, leaving an end result of long and uniform strips of basil leaves.

Basil can be used raw on salads or as a garnish to cooked meals, sautéed with vegetables, or added to different sauces - especially basil pesto. Because of basil's natural sweetness, it is really lovely in sweet dishes and desserts too. One of the best things I've ever eaten is a basil crème brulee - two things I wouldn't have thought to add together but blended surprisingly well. Basil blends especially well with tomatoes, rice, squash, green beans, eggs, carrots, eggplant, nuts, butter, and brie. The most important thing to remember is that the true basil flavor comes from its essential oils. An excessive amount of heat will remove this flavor, so when using in cooked meals add as close to the end of cooking as possible.

## **Recipes:**

[Basil Pesto](#)

[Stir-Fried Asparagus and Basil with Spicy Orange Sauce](#)

[Lemon Basil Crème Brulee](#)

# Bell Peppers

## History:

The ubiquitous pepper, encompassing the Genus *Capsicum* of the *nightshade* family, was carried by Christopher Columbus from the New World to Europe. He gave the bell-shaped fruit its name, hoping to have discovered the source of the much-coveted black pepper. The explorer missed the mark: The black pepper spice is ground from the dried fruit (peppercorn) of a flowering vine, native to South India and wholly unrelated to the New World peppers.



## Selection & Storage:

Fresh bell peppers will have a bright, cheerful color and will be firm to the touch. But even if you have peppers with soft, oozing spots or wrinkly skin, you can excise these aging parts and enjoy the rest in cuisine.

Bell peppers will last in your fridge up to two weeks when kept whole. Just stick it in your crisper, with or without a bag. Green peppers will usually stay fresh a little longer than other colors. If you are storing cut pepper, store slices in an airtight container or in tin foil, where they will last about two days. To freeze, chop the pepper, spread the pieces on a cookie sheet and freeze. Once frozen, transfer them to a freezer bag and put back in the freezer. Bell peppers stored this way will last up to a year.

## Nutrition, Preparation, & Cooking:

Bell peppers vary in nutritional content depending on their color. Green, red, and yellow peppers are all good sources of niacin, folate, dietary fiber, vitamins A, B6, and C (a cup of raw green peppers gives you 200% of your daily vitamin C, red gives you 317%, and yellow a whopping 569%!), potassium, and manganese. Green and yellow also have magnesium and copper; red peppers are good sources of riboflavin and vitamin E; and green and red peppers contain vitamin K and thiamin, and are higher in sugar content than their yellow counterparts.

Peppers are tricky to cut up without making seeds fly. To minimize mess, this is how I cut up a bell pepper: First, stand the pepper upright. Hold one side of the pepper to steady it, and slice the pepper a little to the side of the stem (wherever you think the center of seeds end - kind of like how you slice an apple to remove the core). Do this to the other three remaining sides of the pepper. At the end, hopefully, you'll have four clean sections of pepper and only the center stem and seeds as waste.

Peppers are extremely versatile vegetables to serve, and are delicious raw, roasted, sautéed, stuffed, and added to soups and pasta sauces. Flavors that complement bell peppers well include eggplant, eggs, zucchini, onion, cheese, garlic, hot chili pepper, tomato, and a wide variety of herbs and spices like basil, thyme, and cilantro.

**Recipes:**

[Ratatouille](#)

[Creole Stuffed Peppers](#)

[Lemon-Garlic Chickpea Dip with Bell Peppers](#)

[Homemade Bell Pepper Pasta Sauce](#)

# Broccoli

## History:

Early Etruscans began cultivating broccoli in the 8th century BCE in modern day Turkey. The cruciferous vegetable was later traded with the Romans and spread throughout the empire, where it soon became a favorite. Famed Roman naturalist Pliny the Elder praised broccoli in his writings. Emperor Tiberius' son once ate so much broccoli in one month that his urine turned bright green; the emperor yelled at him for "living precariously." Catherine de Medici later brought broccoli to France in 1533 where it became a delicacy.



Broccoli did not catch on in the U.S. quite so easily. Thomas Jefferson was among the first in America to write about broccoli, though it wasn't until Italian immigrants reintroduced broccoli that it eventually became popular. The D'Arrigio Brothers Company harvested the first full crop in 1922 and shipped it across the country. Their business floundered, however, after cartoonist E.B. White published a cartoon in the New Yorker depicting a child refusing to eat broccoli, saying: "I say it's spinach, and I say the hell with it."

After a few decades of being confused with other vegetables, including cabbage and cauliflower (and understandable mix-up, given they're all of the same species), broccoli eventually caught on as a popular mainstay in U.S. cuisine.

## Selection & Storage:

Select broccoli bunches that are dark green and feel hard and crisp. Like greens, the darker the color the more nutritious it generally is. The darker color comes from the beta-carotene content, so broccoli with lighter yellow buds will be more lacking in this. Rubbery, bendable stalks signify older or poor quality broccoli. You should also avoid open, flowering, or discolored bud clusters and broccoli with tough, woody stems as these qualities usually represent broccoli that was overgrown before harvesting.

Do not wash broccoli until just before use, and store in a plastic bag in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator. Broccoli is best when used within three or four days, but will stay relatively fresh for about a week.

## Nutrition, Preparation, & Cooking:

It may surprise you, but the stalks and florets of broccoli have different nutritional qualities. Both sections of the broccoli are excellent sources of protein, thiamin, pantothenic acid, calcium, iron, selenium, vitamins A, B6, and C, riboflavin, phosphorus, potassium, folate, magnesium, and manganese. The florets also provide good amount of dietary fiber and vitamins E and K. The stalks also contain niacin, and have more vitamin C, calcium, and iron than the florets. So next time you're using broccoli, make sure to cut up the stalks along with the florets for some added vitamins and minerals!

Broccoli is very easy to prepare. After washing, remove any leftover leaf tendrils. Then cut the florets off individually from the stem, and chop up the remaining stem if using.

The best way to prepare broccoli to maintain its nutritional value (if you're not eating it raw) is to steam or sauté it in a little broth or water. Nutrients are left behind in waste water when boiled. Steam

broccoli five to ten minutes, until the pieces are bright green and tender enough to pierce with a fork while still maintaining crispness. Broccoli is another versatile vegetable – you can eat it raw, boiled, steamed, sautéed, added to soups, salads, or pasta, pureed, or even as a pizza topping (my personal favorite). Complementary flavors include basil, caraway seed, curry, dill, lemon, marjoram, oregano, soy sauce, tarragon, and thyme.

### **Recipes:**

Broccoli is one of those vegetables that you can just throw in to almost any dish you're making for added color and nutrition. If you want to serve it alone though, here is one of my favorite recipes: put about ¼ to ½ cup olive oil in a heavy saucepan with 4 or 5 minced garlic cloves, a pinch of salt, and a ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes. Bring to a boil and let simmer for about 10 minutes. Pour mixture in a dish and allow to fall back to room temperature. In the meantime, blanch a few stalks of broccoli (both the florets and the stems) for 2 or 3 minutes and immediately plunge into ice water to stop the cooking. Drain and toss the broccoli with the cooled oil mixture, about 2 tablespoons soy sauce and added garlic and salt to taste. Serve cold or at room temperature.

[Broccoli Soup](#)

[Oven-Roasted Broccoli](#)

[Leslie's Broccoli, Wild Rice, and Mushroom Stuffing](#)

# Cabbage

## History:

The present-day cabbage plant is the result of thousands of years of agricultural selection. The earliest remains of *brassica oleracea* were found in China, dated from approximately 4,000 BCE. Since that time, the plant has undergone numerous transformations at the hands of farmers across the globe, taking the forms of what we now recognize as kale, cauliflower, kohlrabi, broccoli and Brussels sprouts. It wasn't until the 1st century CE that cabbage began to resemble the familiar cluster of tender young leaves, when the Celts brought it to the Mediterranean region from Asia via the Roman Empire.



Since cabbage thrives in cooler climates, yields large harvests and stores well over long periods of time, it became wildly popular in Europe. In fact, its modern name is derived from the French “caboche,” meaning “head,” referring to its round shape. Cole slaw, also of European origin, derives from the Dutch “kool sla”, or “cabbage salad.”

As the popularity and abundance of cabbage grew among the peasantry, it became the subject of much disdain among the noble classes - so much so that it was rumored to carry the Plague. Eventually, the cabbage’s status was restored by its endurance for long sea voyages. It was brought to the Americas in 1536 by the French and was later used by the crew of British explorer James Cook to prevent gangrene. Cabbage’s healthful properties continue to this day, as it is now known to reduce the risk of certain cancers, particularly breast, ovarian, bladder and lung.

## Storage:

If you’re anything like me, your refrigerator is full of the past few weeks’ cabbages, despite efforts to use them up every week. In order to get the most out of this hearty and nutritious vegetable, knowing proper storage techniques is essential.

Like all other leafy greens, cabbage should not be washed until immediately before use - the extra moisture will encourage premature rot. Further, placing a paper towel or two in a sealed plastic bag with your greens, lettuces, and cabbages helps to absorb excess moisture. Storing your cabbage in the fridge this way will keep it fresh for one to two weeks.

If one to two weeks is not enough time, there is good news! Cabbage, if prepped and stored properly, can be frozen for up to 18 months. Although more time-consuming than tossing it in the fridge, this technique could save you from throwing out rotted heads of cabbage. The steps are as follows:

- \* Remove tough outer leaves and wash the head of cabbage
- \* Cut into thin wedges, or separate leaves
- \* Blanch for about two minutes, then transfer immediately into ice water to cool the cabbage down quickly and stop it from cooking further
- \* Drain and let dry completely
- \* Store in airtight or freezer bags and freeze at once

### **Nutrition, Preparation, & Cooking:**

Both the red and white cabbages have significant nutrient value. They are excellent sources of vitamins K and C, dietary fiber, manganese, folate, vitamin B(1, 2, and 6), omega 3 fatty acids, calcium, potassium, and protein - and one cup contains only 33 calories, and no saturated fat or cholesterol. Cabbage is often praised as one of the most filling and nutritious foods for its low calorie and fat content, and is thus an excellent addition to any dieter's menu.

Preparing cabbage for cooking is very simple once you get past the initial cut in half. Once you get the head into halves or quarters, I would suggest cutting the inner dense core out of the cabbage (the solid white lower section that holds the leaves together). This part of the cabbage has a much stronger flavor and different texture than the leaves, and most people prefer not to use it. You can then slice it thinly lengthwise for longer strands of cabbage, or cut it into chunks and give it a rough chop until you've reached the desired size.

Cabbage is wonderful raw in coleslaw or salads, sautéed, boiled, or added to almost any soup. It pairs well with lemon, olive oil, and a variety of spices including anise, basil, caraway seed, dill, mustard, fennel, oregano, black pepper, and tarragon.

### **Recipes:**

There are many traditional cabbage recipes from around the world. We encourage you to look them up and try them out! They include: stuffed cabbage (Chinese/Eastern European), cabbage stir fry (Chinese), corned beef and cabbage (Irish American), coleslaw (Dutch), cabbage and potatoes (Irish), sauerkraut (German).

[Quick and Easy Cabbage Soup](#)

# Eggplant

## History:

*Solanum melongena*, a member of the nightshade family, was long thought to be poisonous. In Europe, the eggplant's affiliation with "deadly nightshade" earned it the moniker "mad apple." King Louis XIV of France was the first to introduce eggplant at his table and garden, though his dinner guests were purportedly hesitant to try the vegetable due to its toxic reputation.

There is some truth in these tales - raw eggplant skin contains the toxin solanine (the same toxin in the green skins of potatoes), hence we recommend not eating it raw. Cooking eggplant breaks down the toxin.

Early forms of eggplant were small and white, similar to eggs, hence its modern name.

Thomas Jefferson brought the eggplant to the United States, where it was used as a decorative table ornament until the 20th century. Today, there is still a spiny white eggplant grown in Jefferson's preserved garden at Monticello.



## Selection & Storage:

When selecting your eggplant, look for one that is symmetrical and has uniformly colored skin. They should feel heavy, and be clear of wrinkly skin, tan patches, or dark or soft patches. A good way to check freshness is to lightly press your finger into the skin of an eggplant - if the finger mark disappears quickly, it is fresh. Also, try not to choose an eggplant that is overly large; ones that are over six inches in diameter tend to be bitter and tough to eat.

A whole eggplant is pretty easy to store - just cover it in plastic wrap and stick it in the fridge. They usually stay fresh up to 10 days. Like most vegetables, freezing eggplant will extend its life considerably - up to eight months! Simply peel, cut into thin slices, and blanch in boiling water with lemon juice added (this prevents discoloration) for a few minutes. After you have plunged it in ice water and all excess water is removed, place in airtight bags and freeze immediately.

## Preparation & Cooking:

Wash your eggplant just before use, and cut off the cap on top. Depending on the toughness of skin and your personal preference, peel the eggplant (I suggest using a knife for this and not a vegetable peeler, since the eggplant skin is pretty tough and thick). Then, slice or cube as desired. Eggplant **should not be eaten raw**, nor is it very pleasant when undercooked, but fortunately it cannot be overcooked. The longer an eggplant is cooked, the softer it gets, with no harm done.

Complementary flavors include olive oil, basil, bay leaves, allspice, oregano, sage, thyme, garlic, chili powder, and parsley. They are most often paired with onions and tomatoes, but go well with a large variety of other vegetables as well.

Popular ways of cooking eggplant include sautéing it and frying it - but here is something to keep in mind: Recent studies have shown that eggplant absorbs about four times more fat than other

vegetables when cooked in any type of oil. So if you're worried about your fat intake, try baking, broiling, or grilling it for much healthier but equally delicious options.

**Recipes:**

[Ratatouille](#)

[Roasted Eggplant with Basil and Lemon](#)

[Honey Glazed Roasted Vegetables](#)

[Eggplant "Steaks"](#)

# Kohlrabi

## History:

The kohlrabi may be European, but its origin is largely unclear. We do know, however, that it was already relatively well known in Europe by the 1st century CE. Pliny the Elder in his writings around that time mentions a "Corinthian Turnip," and by the description of its growing habits, it is almost certainly the same vegetable that we now call kohlrabi. It is even mentioned in the Roman cookbook of Apicius - the oldest cookbook in the world!

Charlemagne, emperor of the Holy Roman Emperor in 800 CE, gave kohlrabi its modern name (it means cabbage-turnip in German) and ordered it to be grown throughout his lands. It found its way to India by 1600, and more recently became a staple in China and Africa as well. It is still largely unknown in the Americas.



## Selection & Storage:

Choose a kohlrabi that is small or medium sized with smooth bulb-stems and firm leaves. Larger kohlrabi tends to be tougher and much bitterer and stronger tasting than smaller ones. Kohlrabi can either be deep violet or light green in color.

Kohlrabi will stay fresh up to several weeks stored in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. The leaves are delicious greens to eat, but make sure to remove them from the bulb and store separately; they stay fresh only a few days and suck up moisture from the bulb, decreasing the crispness and flavor of it.

## Nutrition, Preparation, & Cooking:

Kohlrabi is a low-calorie, low-carb vegetable that is packed full of necessary vitamins and minerals. A cup of kohlrabi provides you with nearly 20% of your daily dietary fiber and an astounding 140% of your daily vitamin C. It is also an excellent source of thiamin, folate, magnesium, phosphorus, vitamin B6, potassium, copper, and manganese.

To prepare your kohlrabi, first remove the leaves and tough outer stems and roots if you haven't already removed them prior to storage. To loosen the skin, either steam the bulb whole or just cut the skin off (it is tough, so I recommend using a paring knife rather than a vegetable peeler).

Although kohlrabi is rather unknown in this country, it is one of the most versatile vegetables out there. It is the only vegetable (that I know of, anyway) where the bulb and the leaves are equally usable and delicious but completely different in flavor. The bulb is reminiscent of broccoli stem and cabbage but has the bite of radish and the sweetness of turnips, too. And the greens are much like turnip greens or collards. The kohlrabi bulb is delicious cut into wedges or chopped up and sauteed, deep-fried in tempura batter, shredded and added to coleslaw (recipe further down!), roasted, added to potato dishes, or just about any of the ways you like preparing other vegetables. Complementary flavors include Dijon mustard, cheese, curry, garlic, ginger, potatoes, rice wine, sesame oil, and soy sauce.

## Recipes:

[Easy Roasted Kohlrabi](#); [Kohlrabi Puree](#); [Kohlrabi & Apple Slaw with Creamy Coleslaw Dressing](#)

# Squash, Patty Pan

## History:

Patty pan squash are aUFO-shaped squash. The name "patty pan" derives from "a pan for baking a patty." Its French name, "pâtisson," comes from a Provençal word for a cake made in a scalloped mould. Patty pan squash go by many other colorful names, including sunburst squash, scallop squash, custard squash, button squash, cymling and Peter Pans.

Summer squash, including the diminutive patty pan, are harvested while still immature and when the entire squash is tender. They also include the yellow Crookneck squash and green zucchini.

## Nutrition & Culinary Use:

Summer squash varieties are versatile vegetables that make excellent side or main dishes in any meal. Patty pan squash, though it may seem dauntingly unusual in appearance, is no exception and can be treated like any other squash. Because of its mild flavor and diverse cooking options, squash can truly help you discover your inner gourmet chef!

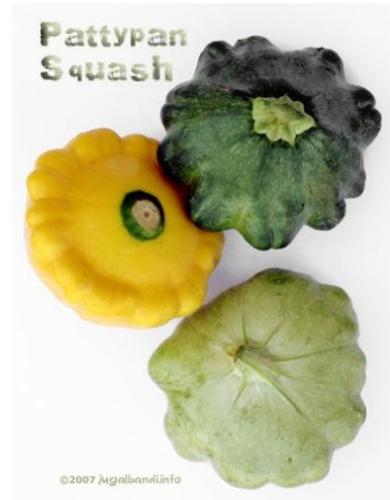
For storage, keep all squash in a sealed plastic bag in the refrigerator - most squash will last this way for at least a week or more. When cleaning, rinse the squash in cool water and gently scrub excess dirt off of its skin. Like the potato, many of the squash's best nutrients are in its skin, so don't peel! The skin is full of the essential nutrient beta-carotene, while the inner squash is not (although patty pan squash as a whole contains magnesium, niacin, and vitamins A and C).

Most squash can be used interchangeably in recipes, so don't hesitate to substitute patty pans into your favorite squash recipes. Squash is excellent served raw as crudité's or grated or sliced on salads, steamed, baked or roasted, sautéed or fried in oil, grilled, marinated or on kebabs with other vegetables. You can add it to any stir fry, steamed with rice, or diced into soups.

Most herbs and flavors can be paired with squash. Enjoy it with garlic, basil, lemon, dill, or even some chili flakes. Squash also marinates well, so next time you're grilling or roasting some veggies, throw it in to your favorite marinade for a few hours and you're good to go.

## Recipes:

[Stuffed Patty Pan Squash](#)



# Squash, Summer

## History:

Squashes are one of the oldest known crops in the Americas, with some varieties from Mexico dating back 10,000 years. The hard outer layer was favored for its use as containers, while the seeds and flesh later became an important part of the pre-Columbian First Nations diet in both South and North America. Early European explorers described what they called “melons” - probably squash - in the Americas and brought them back home.

There is disagreement over the etymology of the name "squash." Some say it comes from the Narragansett Native American word “askutasquash,” which means "eaten raw or uncooked" while others maintain it is derived from the Algonquin "askoot asquash," or "eaten green."



Once the early zucchini was brought back to Europe (aided largely by Columbus) it made its way to Italy where it was cultivated to its current form in the 1920s and named zucchini, meaning “a small squash.” While zucchini is a type of green and tender squash, it can be used in cuisine interchangeably with other summer squashes.

## Storage:

I have always found that most summer squash varieties are pretty hearty, and can be stored very easily. Like lettuce, you should not rinse or scrub your squash until immediately before use. They store best in a plastic bag, and will stay fresh an average of four or five days - although this does not mean they cannot last much longer! I have had squash stay fresh for up to two weeks, and am a frequent user of [Green Bags](#). The most important thing when determining the edibility of squash is to check it for firmness and bright color. As long as it is not dull or wrinkly and is without soft or discolored spots, your squash is usually still perfectly fine to eat.

Like many other fresh foods, you also have the option to freeze them if you are looking to extend their lifeline. Summer squash varieties can be stored up to 12 months if you follow these simple instructions:

- Rinse the squash and cut into ½ inch rounds
- Blanch for about three minutes, and immediately transfer to ice water to stop internal cooking
- Let all excess water drain away completely
- Store in plastic bags or airtight containers, freeze immediately

## Nutrition, Preparation, & Cooking:

Summer squash varieties, like many other fresh vegetables, are very high in vitamin content and very low in calories. Zucchini and squash are good sources of vitamins A, B6, C, and K, protein, niacin, thiamin, phosphorus, copper, dietary fiber, and potassium. Squash is excellent when eaten raw - and eating it this way has the added benefit of getting the full nutritional benefit, as cooking nearly any vegetable will decrease their vitamin and mineral content a little.

Summer squash has the additional benefit of being one of the most flexible vegetables with which to work. You can prepare this vegetable almost any way - after rinsing and scrubbing the squash and

cutting off the ends, you can slice it with a knife or mandolin, grate it, or chop it into chunks. The cooking possibilities are just as endless: eat it raw as crudités, sliced or grated raw on salads, sauté it, steam it, roast it, bake it in a casserole or add it to a soup. And because of its mild flavor and easy adaptability, you can experiment with multiple vegetables, sauces, marinades, and additional flavors. My personal favorites include adding squash to pasta sauce and vegetable soups, eating it steamed with salt and pepper added, or complementing it with flavors such as basil, oregano, garlic, dill, marjoram, or mint.

### **Recipes:**

[Paula Deen's Zucchini Bread](#)

[Summer Squash Soup with Basil](#)

[Summer Squash Pancakes](#)

[Zucchini "Pizza"](#)

# Squash, Winter

## History:

Squash was an integral part of life in the early Americas. The Iroquois Nation and some other North American tribes revered winter squash, along with beans and corn, as the "Three Sisters" - three "companion plantings" that complemented each other, both nutritionally and in the soil. The squash provided beta-carotene, Omega 3's and potassium while the beans and corn provided good sources of protein. Planted together, usually on a mound, the Sisters supported each other's growth: beans added nutrients into the soil, corn provided a structure for beans to climb, while squash crowded out weeds and helped to retain soil moisture.



The labels of "winter" and "summer" were used by early European planters to designate the optimal growing seasons for each squash. They found that the golden yellow and orange vine-type plants were best harvested in the Fall, and could be stored for months throughout the winter. Winter squash were called "Good Keepers" because they could "keep" through the cold winter months.

## Storage:

The best thing about winter squash is how long they last. Sitting on your pantry shelf, these squash - which include butternut, acorn, hubbard, and spaghetti - will last about two months. I wouldn't recommend putting them in your refrigerator, as the cooler temperature will damage the texture and flavor of the squash.

When choosing your squash, look for one that is heavy for its size with hard, deeply-colored, blemish-free skin.

## Nutrition, Preparation, & Cooking:

Winter squash have the advantage of being both very filling and nutritious at the same time. Having less than 40 calories per cup (raw) and virtually no sodium, squash is not only very healthful but also an excellent source of dietary fiber, vitamins A, B6, and C, calcium, iron, riboflavin, copper, magnesium, potassium, and folate.

Winter squash usually have a much thicker skin than summer varieties, so eating the skin is not recommended (nor at all enjoyable). That said, it is easier to cook the squash while still in the shell and then scooping out the softened flesh afterwards. First, wash the skin off the squash. Then, halve or slice the squash, depending on what you're making. Scoop out the seeds and pulp, and discard (unless you want to roast the seeds for an easy and delicious snack). Then you can bake, roast, steam, puree, mash, or sauté the squash, depending on your recipe.

These squash varieties are just as versatile as their summer counterparts, but have the added advantage of already coming in their own serving dish. It is most popular to serve winter squash, especially acorns, halved, baked, dressed, and still in their shell. Squash go well with many flavors, including but certainly not limited to butter, varied herbs, cream sauces, brown sugar, maple syrup, tomato sauces, cheese, nuts, and various fruits. Squash can also be chopped or mashed and used in things like pies and soups,

but I find that serving winter squash in their naturally beautiful serving dish is a fun and different way to experience this hearty vegetable.

### **Recipes:**

I grew up eating acorn squash in the winter, and my mom's recipe for it is still one of my favorites today. Simply halve an acorn squash, remove the pulp and seeds, and lay it cut-side-down on a baking sheet that is lined with tin foil and lightly sprayed with Pam. Bake at 350 degrees F for about 30 minutes, flip the squash halves over, and bake for another 30 minutes or so, until the flesh is softened. In the last 10 minutes of baking, place a big scoop of butter and brown sugar in the indentations and finish baking.

[Apple Stuffed Squash](#)

[Roasted Squash Seeds](#)

[Penne with Braised Squash and Greens](#)

# Sweet Potato Leaves

## History:

Sweet potatoes were domesticated in tropical South America and the Caribbean at least 5,000 years ago, with the actual center of origin somewhere in Central America. Another variation of sweet potato (there are over 1,000 different species!), known as kumara, has been domesticated in Polynesia for nearly 3,000 years, well before western exploration. Sweet potatoes are also known as camotes (kamotes) in the southwestern United States, and yams in other places - although they actually have no relation to the actual yam which is native to Africa and Asia.



Sweet potato leaves were and still are mainly consumed in Southeast Asia, the Pacific islands, and Latin America. The leaves and stems can be used as forage, and are often considered a "poor man's food" in these parts of the world. Despite the negative connotation, these leaves actually do fill the protein-gap that many of the poorer areas of these countries acquire from relying solely on the tuber itself for nourishment. Sweet potatoes themselves can grow in almost any tropical or sub-tropical climatic region, but the leaves require a lush and highly organic soil to really flourish.

## Storage:

As much as I love leafy greens, I can rarely escape their one inevitable downside - how quickly they can go bad. And as much as I disliked Biology in high school, the subject can be surprisingly helpful in the kitchen. A basic storage rule for produce is to keep your veggies from open air, so one will naturally turn to an airtight bag or container when storing anything. This method of preventing evaporation is usually helpful, don't get me wrong, but leafy greens are a different story. They too suffer from evaporation - leaves wilt as the plant loses water, causing cell walls to break down and collapse inwards. But airtight bags will prohibit the evaporated water from escaping, causing excess moisture to build in the air, which will actually speed up this cell wall-collapsing process.

Instead, I always loosely wrap my greens in a paper towel or two and stick them in a plastic grocery bag. This process will help keep the greens moist enough to prevent wilting (the paper towel will dampen, but keep the greens from being exposed to actual water droplets), while also allowing a little open air access, as the grocery bag serves as a great protector while not actually being airtight. My greens will almost always last a week or even a little longer when stored this way. To minimize waste, save both the bag and paper towel for reuse for the next batch of greens to come your way.

## Nutrition, Preparation, & Cooking:

Since many people are not aware that this tuber's leaves are even edible, their wealth of vitamins, minerals, and protein often go to waste (unless some lucky critter gets to them before the potatoes are harvested). These leaves are bursting with vitamins A, B6, and C, protein, calcium, niacin, iron, and dietary fiber. They contain no cholesterol, a negligible amount of sodium and carbohydrates, and contain only 12 calories a cup (uncooked, chopped).

The first step in prepping sweet potato leaves is to rinse and drain them, a general rule for any fresh

produce. Some people then blanch the leaves in boiling water for a few minutes prior to further cooking. This step is optional, but is beneficial especially if your leaves are on the older side as it helps get rid of the "slime" that can appear as leaves wilt and age. From there, sweet potato leaves are as versatile as any other leafy green. They are usually sautéed, fried, or eaten raw in salads, and are best with olive oil, garlic, chili powder and fresh chilies, coconut milk, or soy sauce.

### **Recipes:**

[Sweet Potato Greens and Rice](#)

[African Stew with Sweet Potato Leaves](#)

[Kamote Salad](#) – a traditional Filipino dish

[Simple Stir-Fried Sweet Potato Leaves](#)

# Swiss Chard

## History:

"Swiss" Chard was actually cultivated in the Mediterranean and France - credit for chard's Alpine alias goes to the Swiss botanist who first dubbed its scientific name. Chard is, in fact, cultivated widely in the Mediterranean and France. Its other names include silver beet, spinach beet, Sicilian beet, leaf beet, Chilian beet, sea kale beet, white beet, strawberry spinach, and Roman kale.

"Chard" however, originates from the Latin word *cardus* (French word *chardon*), when it was mistaken for a cardoon, or thistle like plant.

Chard was a genetic predecessor to the beet. The difference between them is the bulbous, meaty root that would eventually become the beet as we know it today. Chard grows in many varieties: white, red, yellow and rainbow. The beet and chard are also relatives of spinach. They are all typically grouped in a category called "leafy greens" which includes collard green, broccoli leaf, and kale.



## Storage:

You can treat Swiss chard like any other leafy green, and just refrigerate it in a plastic bag without washing it until immediately before use. It will stay fresh anywhere from a few days up to a week this way. If you'd rather freeze it for use at a later time, it will last up to a year. Simply remove the woody stems, blanch for a few minutes and then shock in ice water, remove all excess moisture, and freeze in airtight containers immediately.

## Nutrition, Preparation, & Cooking:

'The darker the green, the higher the nutrition content' is a good general rule to follow. Swiss chard, having only seven calories and one gram of carbs per cup, is brimming with valuable vitamins and nutrients. It is an excellent source of vitamins A and C, and also has vitamins B6, E, and K, calcium, iron, thiamin, folate, zinc, riboflavin, dietary fiber, magnesium, phosphorus, copper, and potassium.

Chard stems are optional. Some people like the added texture and color, some don't like how fibrous they are - so use whatever parts of the chard you prefer. After washing the chard, remove leaves from stems, and cut any blemishes or tough areas out of the stems. Then, slice or chop both the stems and the leaves. When cooking, it is best to cook the stems for about five minutes before adding the leaves since they are thicker and require longer time to cook thoroughly.

Swiss chard can be boiled, sautéed, braised, chilled (after cooking) and added to salads, put in soups, or substituted for other greens in any of your favorite recipes. Chard is mild, peppery, earthy and slightly buttery, and is wonderful with olive oil, garlic, vegetable stock, balsamic vinegar, shallots or onions, butter, and a large variety of herbs and spices. The most important thing to remember when cooking with chard is not to overpower it with flavor so you can still fully enjoy its own unique qualities.

## Recipes:

[Simple Swiss Chard Sauté](#); [Whole Wheat Spaghetti with Swiss Chard and Pecorino Cheese](#); [White Pizza with Indian Spiced Greens](#)

# Tomatoes

## History:

Tomatoes were cultivated in Central and South America before Spanish explorers brought them back to Europe. Initially, Europeans grew them for decorative purposes only, fearing their poisonous qualities. These original varieties were likely yellow, as their name was *pomi d'oro* in Spanish and Italian, which means "yellow apples." The French called them *pommes d'amour*, or "love apples" as they were thought to have aphrodisiac qualities. The English term "tomato" is derived from the Spanish *tomatl*, first recorded in the late 16th century.



The first tomato chowder recipe was published in 1872, but it wasn't until Joseph Campbell created his now famed Tomato Soup in 1897 that tomatoes became widely popular. Since then tomatoes seem to be in everything; presently, Americans consume over 12 million tons of tomatoes each year!

## Storage:

Since tomatoes appear delicate and sensitive to temperature, many people feel inclined to stick them in the fridge the moment they get home. If your tomatoes have already reached peak ripeness, this is fine. But if not, let them ripen on the counter for one to five days – putting them in the fridge prematurely will inhibit flavor and juiciness. Once ripe (bright red, not hard to the touch, no brown or open spots), they can last in the refrigerator in a plastic bag another two to five days.

## Nutrition, Preparation, & Cooking:

Tomatoes have a wealth of vitamins and minerals. They are low in sodium, and contain no fat or cholesterol. They are great sources of vitamins A, B6, C, E, and K, dietary fiber, thiamin, niacin, folate, potassium, magnesium, phosphorus, copper, and manganese. Tomatoes are one of the best food sources for an equally filling and nutritious addition to any meal.

Tomatoes can be tricky to prepare since they are so squishy and juicy. A serrated knife works best for slicing, since it minimizes downward pressure on the fragile fruit. If you need to peel tomatoes, don't use a vegetable peeler (believe me - I've tried and it is a completely unsuccessful mess). The best approach is to dip the tomatoes in boiling water for about 30 seconds, loosening their skin so you can slip it off by hand.

Truly the definition of versatile, tomatoes can be enjoyed in every manner conceivable. You can use them in soups, sautéed whole or chopped with other vegetables, roasted, sun dried, braised, grilled, stewed, in salads, in sauces, or (my personal favorite) eaten raw with a little salt and pepper. They go perfectly with salt, pepper, basil, olive oil, balsamic vinegar, tarragon, olives, artichoke hearts, rhubarb, or wine – pretty much anything! I've never encountered a dish that couldn't be improved by throwing in some tomatoes.

## Recipes:

[Ratatouille](#); [Homemade Tomato Soup](#)

# Watermelon

## History:

The earliest known harvest of watermelon took place five thousand years ago in Egypt and is shown in hieroglyphic representations. They were valued in ancient Egyptian culture and were placed in burial tombs as a means of sustenance post-mortem. There was even watermelon seeds found in the famous tomb of young Pharaoh Tutankhamen. By the 10th century watermelon had made its way to China and by the 13th to Europe via the Moors. By 1615 the word watermelon was first recorded in the English dictionary. They supposedly came to the United States in the hands of African slaves.

Today, over 1,200 varieties of watermelon are grown in ninety-six countries. China is the world's top producer of watermelon, while the U.S. currently ranks fourth. In the U.S. approximately forty-four states grow and sell watermelon commercially. There are many new varieties of watermelon still being produced. In Japan farmers grow watermelons in glass boxes or pyramid shaped cases so the watermelons take the shape of their container.

In 1990, the largest watermelon known weighed in at two hundred sixty-two pounds and was recorded in the Guinness Book of World Records.

## Choosing a watermelon:

Watermelons are very hearty fruits; the toughest part is choosing the right melon. It is important to pick a watermelon that is heavy for its size, a nice bright green, and has a distinct yellow spot on the bottom. This spot shows you that the melon has ripened fully in the sun sitting on this one sun-deprived spot on the underside. Watermelons do not ripen once picked from the vine, so choosing your melon is of the utmost importance.

Once home, whole watermelons will last about ten days on your countertop, and up to two weeks in the refrigerator. If cut up, watermelon will only last three or four days in the refrigerator. If you want to save it until the watermelon-deprived winter months, freezing your melon will keep it for up to a year. Cube or slice the melon, put it into airtight containers or freezer bags, and place in the freezer.

## Nutrition & Preparation:

Although watermelons are made mostly of water, they still have significant nutritional value. A cup of watermelon has only 46 calories (mostly from sugars), and is chock full of vitamins A and C and potassium, and a little dietary fiber too.

Watermelons, especially the big ones, can seem a little daunting to cut at first. But here is a foolproof method for successfully cutting a melon no matter the size: After washing the melon rind, slice the top and bottom off. Stand the melon on one end, and slice down the middle. (The seeds grow along the outer dark stripes of the melon, so if you cut on the dark stripes, the seeds will be on the outside of the melon flesh making them easier to remove!) Then, cut each half into sections and remove the rind. Finally, slice or cube the flesh of the melon.



Watermelons go well with many other flavors, especially honey, citrus, ginger, basil, balsamic vinaigrette, and salt.

### **Recipes:**

It's hard to imagine improving upon fresh watermelon; hence people don't typically follow recipes. Still, try adding a little salt to watermelon slices or cubes - believe it or not, the salt will bring out the flavor, enhancing its already intoxicating sweetness.

[Simple Watermelon Basil Vinaigrette](#)

[Paula's Easy Watermelon Dessert](#)

[Tomato, Watermelon, and Basil Skewers](#)

[Watermelon Muffins](#)