Winter Squash

Harvest of the Month provides resources for the cafeteria, classroom, and community to promote the use of local, seasonal foods.

Squash History and Culture

Squash plants are native to Central and North America, and have been a staple food for cultures in those areas for at least 10,000 years. The Wampanoag and other native peoples taught early European colonists how to grow and prepare squash, and from there it has spread into becoming a popular food enjoyed around the world today. There are many different kinds of winter squash. Some types are grown for their edible seeds, others for making containers or for decoration (like a jack-o-lantern!), but most of all they are grown for their fleshy fruit. Winter squash are in the cucumber, or gourd family, of plants, known in Latin as Cucurbitaceae. Other related plants include cucumbers, zucchini, and watermelon.

Sources:
- Smith, Bruce D. The initial domestication of Cucurbita pepo in the Americas 10,000 years ago. Science, v. 276, May 9, 1997: 932-934.
- http://oyate.org/index.php/resources/43-resources/thanksgiving
- NH Indigenous Harvest Calendar with primary source: https://nhfarmtoschool.org/enjoy-the-harvest/

Fun Facts

- “Squash” comes from the Narragansett Native American word askutasquash, which means “eaten raw or uncooked.”
- The world’s largest squash was a green squash weighing in at 2118 pounds!

Sources:
- https://www.loc.gov/everyday-mysteries/agriculture/item/how-did-squash-get-its-name/
- https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/heaviest-squash

Reading Corner

- Freedom Soup, by Tami Charles
- Gathering Up the Harvest, by Jennie Eaglespeaker
- The Little Squash Seed, by Gayla Scale
- Pumpkin Pumpkin, by Jeanne Titherington
- Too Many Pumpkins, by Linda White

Varieties of Winter Squash

Acorn
Gourd
Algonquin
Hubbard
Buttercup
Kabocha
Butternut
Kuri
Delicata
Pumpkin
Dumpling
Spaghetti
Winter Squash

Benefits

Winter squash is rich in Vitamin A, important for eye health; Vitamin C, important for immune system function; and fiber, important for digestive health.

Source: Harvard School of Public Health
https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/food-features/winter-squash/

Classroom Connections

Social Studies

Three Sisters Matching Game

The Three Sisters is a very well-known Indigenous planting strategy. Each plant provides the other with aid and protection to foster plant growth in a mutually beneficial relationship.

This activity is a fun and easy way to introduce different names of the vegetables and to introduce the Abenaki language in the classroom. Students can become more comfortable identifying the different varieties of vegetables that can be used in the Three Sisters. Please visit the New Hampshire Indigenous Harvest Calendar to see the full activity and more resources about Three Sisters gardening and foods.


Science

Winter Squash Sensory Exploration

Preparation:
- Roast and puree 1-2 of the squash (do 1 squash per 10 kids):
- Prepare another 2 squashes raw:
- Roast seeds from squash that were cooked
- Reserve 2 whole squashes.
- On the day of the lesson, set up stations. One for each sense.

Procedure:
Start by asking students what their five senses are. Tell students that they will be using their 5 senses to learn more about squash. Before you start the stations, ask the students to make some guesses or hypotheses on how they think the squash will taste, smell, look, sound and feel. As they go through the stations, ask students to think about how to describe what they observe. Once the stations have been explored, bring the students together to discuss what they noticed as a group. Make a chart with each of the 5 senses on it, and go through each sense asking what the students discovered. Conclude the activity by asking students to help you clean up and make sure to bring the uneaten squash to the food service staff to add to the school meal or prepare the rest as a snack or a taste test for the school.

The squash and seeds could also be used for a math lesson. Students can count the seeds and estimate the weight of the squash. Or get a few varieties of squash and have the students compare their weights and seed sizes and number and shape.

For more detailed instructions for this activity please see the Squash Extended Harvest Lesson: http://www.vermontharvestofthemonth.org/december-winter-squash.html