Winter Squash
Educator | VermontHarvestoftheMonth.org

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

Fun Facts
- Winter squash has a water content of 81%; summer squash has a water content of 98%.
- Gourds, a type of winter squash, are widely grown for ornamental purposes: as decoration during holidays, for carving, and for making bird feeders!

Reading Corner
Children’s Books
- The Little Squash Seed, by Gayla Scale
- Pumpkin Pumpkin, by Jeanne Titherington
- Too Many Pumpkins, by Linda White

History of Winter Squash
Humans have consumed squash for over 10,000 years. Squash are native to Central America, between Mexico and Guatemala. Originally, squashes were cultivated for the consumption of their seeds only, as they had minimal, bitter-tasting flesh; over time, flesher, fruitier varieties were developed. In Aztec, Incan, Mayan and Native American cultures, squashes were grown in companionship with corn and beans. Squashes are a member of the Cucurbitaceae family, also known as the gourd family, along with cucumbers, summer squash (pattypan, zucchini), and watermelon.

Other Winter Squash Varieties
- Acorn
- Buttercup
- Butternut
- Delicata
- Hubbard
- Kuri
- Spaghetti

Dumpling, Gourd (edible and ornamental), Kabocha and Pumpkin (edible and ornamental).

Sources: The Visual Food Encyclopedia, The Encyclopedia of Healing Foods, GMFTS.
History | The Three Sisters
Directions:
- Ask the guiding question: Why are these three crops planted together?
- Have students research what companion planting is and how Native Americans incorporated the three sisters into their agricultural practices.

Source: GMFTS.

Math | Weighing Squash & Counting Seeds
Supplies needed:
Varieties of winter squash—aim for small (delicata), medium (acorn, kuri) and large (butternut), a scale, drop cloths, knives.

Directions:
- Have students estimate the weight of each variety of squash and the number of seeds each variety contains. Write estimates on the board.
- Weigh each variety and write the results next to the estimates.
- Cut the squashes in half for the students, as this task can be an unsafe task for students.
- Have students count the seeds of each variety and write the results next to the estimates.
- Compare and contrast the estimates with the results and make general comparisons between the varieties.

Sources: Upper Valley Farm-to-School, GMFTS.

Science | Winter Squash Sensory Exploration
Supplies needed:
Several varieties of squash, vegetable peeler, baking sheet, food processor, olive oil, salt and pepper, tasting spoons (one or two for each student).

Directions:
- Set up 5 stations, one to address each of the five senses (sight, touch, taste, smell and hearing).
- Set up each station with a variety of cooked and raw squash (half a squash, roasted seeds, raw seeds, peel, raw chunks, roasted squash and puréed squash).
- Have students rotate through each station in small groups. Encourage students to generate vocabulary that describes how they experience squash with their senses; ask guiding questions to help with this process.
- After students have rotated through the stations, meet as a whole class to record some vocabulary generated at the stations. Try to focus on words that describe healthy foods (crunchy, yellow etc.).
- Ask students, “Why are your 5 senses related to cooking? How does exploring squash with your senses relate to eating and cooking it?”

Source: Upper Valley Farm-to-School.
Note: For an extended, standards-based version of this lesson plan, please visit Upper Valley Farm-to-School’s Harvest Lessons: http://www.uvfts.org/fts-tools/classroom/harvest-lessons/.

Benefits
Winter squash is an excellent source of vitamin A, the mineral potassium and carotene pigments; it is a good source of vitamin B1 (thiamine), B5 (pantothenic acid), B9 (folic acid) and C, as well as dietary fiber and the mineral copper.