Respecting Indigenous Foods: Squash

Culture of Squash

Indigenous Peoples brought squash to what is now North America from what is now Central and South America thousands of years ago. It has become an important part of the lives and culture of tribes across the continent.

- Squash provides many nutrients for good health. Some varieties are eaten in summer and others store well for winter meals.
- Squash are baked whole in the coals of a fire or sliced and boiled. Strips of squash are dried in the sun and rehydrated in winter by soaking or boiling.
- Squash blossoms are eaten fresh and dried.
- Squash seeds are roasted and spiced for adding to pemmican or nut and fruit mixes.
- The hardened skins of squash can be hollowed out and used as ceremonial decorations and as storage containers.
- Dried squash strips can be used to weave mats.

Squash is an excellent source of fiber and vitamins A and C.

Stovetop Quinoa

Quinoa, an Indigenous whole grain, is the second layer of Chef Craig’s flavorful dish on the other side.

Ingredients:
1 cup quinoa (if not pre-rinsed, rinse well using a fine-mesh strainer)
2 cups water
¼ teaspoon salt (optional)

Directions:
1. In a saucepan, bring water to a boil. Add quinoa and salt, if desired, and return to a boil.
2. Reduce heat to low, cover pan and simmer for 12 minutes.
3. Turn off heat and let stand until water is absorbed and quinoa has the texture you like, about 5 to 10 minutes.

Note: For a roasted flavor, toast the grains first. Stir around in the pan at medium heat for a few minutes before adding liquid.

Makes 3 cups

Chef Nephi Craig
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Chef Craig, who is Western Apache and Diné, is dedicated to raising respect for Indigenous foods. His work helps Indigenous People reconnect to their food and landscape. Chef Craig created the Harissa Roasted Butternut Squash dish (see other side) using squash, chiles, quinoa and agave. As these Indigenous foods traveled the globe, they contributed to lasting changes within other world food cultures. In the words of Chef Craig, “Have fun and cook on!”
**Herbed Yogurt Sauce**

**Ingredients:**
- 2 cups low-fat plain Greek yogurt
- 2 Tablespoons olive oil
- 2 Tablespoons agave syrup
- 2 Tablespoons chopped parsley
- 1 Tablespoon chopped mint
- 1 Tablespoon chopped cilantro
- 1 dash each salt and pepper

**Directions:**
1. Wash hands with soap and water.
2. In a medium bowl, combine all ingredients. Chill until ready to serve.
3. Refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours.

Makes 2 1/2 cups
Prep time: 10 minutes

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**Harissa Roasted Butternut Squash**

**Ingredients:**
- 1 medium butternut squash, 3 pounds
- 2 Tablespoons olive oil
- 2 Tablespoons harissa spice mix, divided
- 2 Tablespoons agave syrup
- 1 Tablespoon lemon juice
- 2 Tablespoons toasted pumpkin seeds (optional)
- 1 Tablespoon toasted pine nuts (optional)
- 1 Tablespoon each torn mint and cilantro

**Directions:**
1. Wash hands with soap and water.
2. Preheat oven to 400 degrees F.
3. Peel squash, cut in half above the rounded end and cut each piece in half lengthwise. Scoop out seeds and cut into 1-inch pieces.
4. In a large bowl, stir together the squash, oil and 1 Tablespoon harissa until the squash is evenly coated.
5. Pour squash onto a rimmed baking sheet. Roast until edges begin to brown and pieces are soft when pricked with a fork, about 20 minutes. Stir in ½ to 1 Tablespoon harissa (use less for a milder flavor).
6. On a large dish, spread the yogurt sauce to form a shallow bowl. Add warm quinoa to the center and top with roasted squash.
7. Before serving, drizzle with agave and lemon juice. Sprinkle with seeds and nuts, if desired, and top with torn herbs.

Notes: Cooking with a group? Have kids and adults help with a part of the recipe.

Makes 6 cups
Prep time: 25 minutes
Cook time: 20 minutes

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No harissa? Blend together: 1 ½ teaspoons cayenne; 1 teaspoon each smoked paprika, cumin and coriander; and ½ teaspoon each garlic powder, ground caraway seed and salt.

To learn more about Chef Craig and his accomplishments, visit Instagram @nephi_craig