

Florida Food Fare

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Calabaza

Description: A pumpkin-like squash popular throughout the Caribbean as well as Central and South America. The calabaza, which is also called West Indian pumpkin or green pumpkin, is round in shape and can range in size from as large as a watermelon to as small as a cantaloupe. Its skin can range in color from green to pale tan to light red orange; its flesh is a brilliant orange. Calabaza has a sweet flavor akin to that of a butternut squash. Its texture is firm and succulent.

Availability: Year-round. Grown in South Florida for much of the year, it is also imported from Central and South America during the rest of the year.

Selection and Care: When buying whole calabaza look for those that are unblemished and heavy for their size. The stem should still be attached. Whole calabaza can be stored in a cool dark place for up to 6 weeks. Calabaza is also available cut in wedges or halved in some stores. Cut calabaza should be fresh, moist, tightly grained with no signs of soft or wet spots. It should be wrapped tightly and refrigerated for no more than 1 week. Cooked, pureed calabaza will keep in the freezer for up to 1 year, packed tightly in airtight containers.

Nutritional Value: An extremely good source of vitamin A. One-half cup of calabaza contains the following nutrients: 32 calories, 8 gm carbohydrates, 1 gm protein, 5460 IU vitamin A, 15 mg vitamin C, 246 mg potassium, and a trace of fat.

Use & Preparation: Can be used in anyway suitable for pumpkin and winter squashes like acorn and butternut squash. Slicing the tough rind of an uncut calabaza calls for a heavy cleaver or very sharp knife. If it still resists, remove the stem and position a large, sharp knife along the length of the squash. Gently tap the base of the blade where it joins the handle with a mallet or hammer until the

squash falls open. Scoop out the seeds and fibers and proceed as you would for a squash. The seeds are crisp and delicious toasted.

Calabaza generally cooks more quickly and is less watery than pumpkin. It is best when well seasoned and mixed with other ingredients for dishes such as soups, stews, pies and custards. Yields: 1 – 1 1/2 pounds = 3 servings; 1 pound = 1 2/3 to 2 cups cooked mashed squash.

Recipes:

Calabaza Orange Cups

2 cups cooked, mashed calabaza	2 teaspoons grated orange rind
4 whole oranges	1/3 cup orange juice
2 tablespoons butter	1/2 cup fresh orange flesh, chopped
2 tablespoons brown sugar	1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
1 teaspoon salt, or less to taste	Garnish: 1/4 cup chopped nuts, optional

Boil or bake chunks of calabaza until tender. Slice tops off oranges to form a container for calabaza mixture, and hollow out flesh. Save orange juice, flesh and rind. Level off base of oranges so that they will stand upright.

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. Combine 2 cups calabaza with butter, brown sugar, salt, orange rind, juice, and chopped orange sections (be sure to remove seeds). Fill hollowed orange shells with the calabaza mixture. Place in a baking dish. Sprinkle tops with nutmeg and chopped nuts. Cover dish and bake 20-30 minutes. Remove cover and bake until brown, about 15 minutes more. Allow one calabaza filled orange per person. Serves 4.

Calabaza Pancakes

1 small calabaza	1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
1 1/2 cups pancake mix	1/4 teaspoon ginger
1/4 cup wheat germ	2 eggs, slightly beaten
2 tablespoons brown sugar	1 1/2 cups 1 % milk
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon	2 tablespoons vegetable oil

Wash calabaza, cut in sections and remove seeds. Place in boiling, salted water and cook until tender. Drain, remove skin and mash. Combine all ingredients in large mixing bowl. Drop by spoonfuls onto an oiled griddle. When mixture bubbles, turn over with spatula. Serve plain or with powdered sugar or syrup. Serves 4-6.