

## A Winter's Delight from Seed to Soup

In the heart of winter, when the frost paints the landscape with its icy brush, a humble yet extraordinary gourd emerges as a beacon of warmth and nourishment. This is the story of butternut squash, a vegetable that has weaved its way into the tapestry of human history, culture, and folklore, offering a symphony of flavors and nutrients that have sustained and delighted generations.

### A Journey Through Time & Space

Butternut squash, which belongs to the *Cucurbitaceae* family of gourds, is also called winter or pumpkin squash. A good source of vitamin C, butternut squash is also rich in carotenoids and minerals.

The butternut squash's origins can be traced back to the ancient Americas, where it was cultivated by indigenous tribes for thousands of years. Its scientific name, *Cucurbita moschata*, reflects its musky, sweet scent, a trait that has earned it a special place in the culinary and cultural landscapes of the Americas. The earliest evidence of its domestication, with seeds found in archaeological sites in the Mexican highlands and Guatemala, dates back to around 5000 BCE.

The butternut squash's journey to the rest of the world is a testament to the power of trade and exploration. It was brought to Europe by Spanish conquistadors in the 16th century who were captivated by its unique flavor and versatility. From there, it spread to the rest of Europe and eventually, to the rest of the world, becoming a staple in many cuisines.

### A Uniquely Shaped Marvel

The butternut squash's unique shape is a result of its natural evolution and selective breeding by ancient farmers. Unlike its rounder cousins, the butternut squash has a long, slender neck and a bulbous, bell-shaped bottom, which makes it easier to store and transport. Its tough, dark-orange skin protects the sweet, orange flesh within, which is denser and less watery than other squash varieties.



### Folklore & Customs

In many Native American cultures, the butternut squash holds a place of reverence. The Iroquois believed that the squash was a gift from the Great Spirit, and its seeds were used in ceremonies to honor the harvest. In some traditions, the butternut squash is associated with fertility and abundance, its seeds symbolizing the cycle of life and rebirth.

In modern times, the butternut squash continues to inspire culinary creativity and cultural traditions. Its vibrant orange color and sweet, nutty flavor make it a favorite in autumn and winter dishes, from soups and stews (*see recipe on next page*), to roasted sides and even desserts.

### A Nutritional Powerhouse

Butternut squash is an excellent source of vitamins A and C, fiber, and potassium, making it a valuable addition to any diet. Its vibrant orange color is a testament to its high beta-carotene content, which the body converts to vitamin A, essential for maintaining healthy vision and supporting the immune system.

Butternut squash has complex carbohydrates and significant amounts of iron, magnesium, potassium, and riboflavin. The gourd also contains carotenoids like alpha-carotene, beta-carotene, beta-cryptoxanthin,

lutein, and zeaxanthin. Butternut squash is a low-fat food, but it also has healthy fats like alpha-linolenic acid, which is a beneficial omega-3 fatty acid with anti-inflammatory properties.

The gourd's vitamin C content is unusually stable during storage and processing. While butternut squash ripens, its flesh produces more vitamin C. If it's stored properly at cool temperatures (54° to 57° F), squash can retain most of its vitamin C content. And this squash will retain about 80% of that content even after about 30 minutes of cooking at 203° F).

Butternut squash seeds are edible and they can be roasted like pumpkin seeds—my personal favorite! The seeds contain: Alpha-, beta-, and gamma-tocopherols (these tocopherols are a precursor of vitamin E),

carotenoids, linoleic acid (a polyunsaturated omega-6 fatty acid), oleic acid, and zinc.

Try making this unique soup recipe that relies on alternative flavors to create a distinctive delight. This soup is not only packed with flavors but also brimming with nutritious, natural ingredients. The spices, such as turmeric and mustard, have powerful anti-inflammatory properties to boost your immune system. Additionally, the coconut milk adds healthy fats and a creamy texture.

The butternut squash is more than just a vegetable—it is a testament to the power of human ingenuity, cultural exchange, and the resilience of nature. As you savor the sweet, comforting flavors of this winter's delight, let it warm not just your body, but also your heart and soul! ■

## **SPICY, HEARTY, HEALTHY BUTTERNUT SQUASH SOUP**

*Vegan, Gluten Free*  
& *Sugar Free*

### **INGREDIENTS:**

- 1 large butternut squash
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 large onion, diced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tbsp grated fresh horseradish (or 1 tsp prepared horseradish)
- 1 tbsp smoked paprika
- 1 tsp ground coriander
- 1 tsp ground turmeric
- 1 tsp ground mustard
- 1/2 tsp black pepper
- 1/4 tsp ground cloves
- 1/4 tsp ground allspice
- 1 can (14.5 oz) diced tomatoes
- 4 cups vegetable broth
- 1 can (14.5 oz) coconut milk
- Salt to taste
- *Optional toppings: chopped fresh parsley, toasted pumpkin seeds, a drizzle of olive oil, or a dollop of Greek yogurt or coconut cream*

### **INSTRUCTIONS:**

- 1) **Preheat your oven to 400° F.** Cut the butternut squash in half lengthwise, scoop out the seeds, and place it on a baking sheet. Drizzle with 1 tbsp of olive oil, sprinkle with salt and pepper, and roast for 45–60 minutes, or until tender.
- 2) **Once the squash is cool enough to handle, scoop out the flesh and set it aside.** You should have about 4 cups of squash flesh.
- 3) **In a large pot, heat the remaining 1 tbsp of olive oil over medium heat.** Add the onion and garlic. Cook, stirring occasionally until the vegetables are softened, about 5–7 minutes.
- 4) **Add the horseradish, smoked paprika, coriander, turmeric, ground mustard, black pepper, cloves, and allspice to the pot.** Stir to combine and cook for 1 minute, allowing the spices to toast and release their flavors.
- 5) **Add the diced tomatoes (with juice), vegetable broth, and the roasted butternut squash to the pot.** Stir to combine, and bring to a boil.
- 6) **Reduce the heat to medium-low, cover the pot, and let it simmer for 20 minutes.** This allows the flavors to meld together and the squash to soften further.
- 7) **Using an immersion blender, blend the soup until smooth.** Alternatively, you can transfer the soup to a blender, working in batches if necessary.
- 8) **Stir in the coconut milk and taste the soup.** Adjust the seasoning with salt if needed. If you prefer a spicier soup, you can add more black pepper or a pinch of cayenne pepper at this stage.
- 9) **Ladle the soup into bowls and garnish with your choice of toppings.** The chopped fresh parsley adds a pop of color and freshness, while the toasted pumpkin seeds provide a satisfying crunch. ■

