Winter Veggies ~ Pumpkins and Squash

I'd rather sit alone on a pumpkin and have it all to myself than be crowded on a velvet cushion.
~Henry David Thoreau

Pumpkins and winter squash deliver healthy doses of potassium, vitamin C, fiber, and a variety of phytonutrients and antioxidants. They add beautiful color to autumn harvests. Whether prepared savory or sweet, they add fabulous flavor to daily meals and holiday feasts.

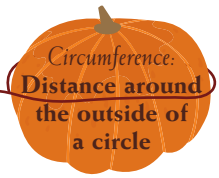
Gather pumpkins and squash in a variety of sizes and colors to use for activities.

Colors of Pumpkins and Squash

At the art easel, put out yellow and red paint. Marvel at how mixing the two colors together, makes a new one – orange. Add green and brown paint. Encourage children to create big and small pumpkins and squash with their variety of colors. Ask them about their artwork and write down what they say. Display the words next to the painting.

How Big Is It?

Have children measure how tall and round the squash and pumpkins are. Use Duplo [Lego] blocks for the height. Count how many Duplos tall the vegetables are. Use a piece of yarn to measure the circumference. Based on measurements, encourage children to estimate which pumpkin or squash is the heaviest. The lightest? Weigh them to find out!



Yum! Yum! Roasted Seeds

Roast pumpkin or squash seeds with older toddlers and preschoolers. Directions: Extract the seeds. Separate and discard pulp. Thoroughly wash seeds in warm water. Spread seeds out on a cookie sheet. Sprinkle with a little salt. Put into oven and bake at 350º F for approximately 20 minutes. Check every five minutes and stir. Seeds are done when the insides are dry. Sample to see if they are done. Cool, and then serve.

JOKES

Q. What would you call a pet squash?

A. Call it anything you want - it won't hear you!

Q. What did the farmer say to the green pumpkin?

A. Why orange you orange?

Winter Squash & Pumpkin Nutrition Facts

The rich yellow and orange colors of winter squash and pumpkins are a dead giveaway that they are loaded with the antioxidants, alpha- and beta-carotene. These carotenes convert to vitamin A in the body and may reduce the risk of developing:

- certain types of cancer
- heart disease
- type 2 diabetes
- some degenerative aspects of aging and other diseases

Pumpkin and squash seeds are highly nutritious, containing zinc and trace minerals that can slow the progression of vision loss. They also help boost eye health, reducing the risk of cataracts and macular degeneration.

Did You Know?

How are pumpkins and winter squash different? There is no botanical difference between them. Pumpkins are a type of squash. Both are members of the cucurbit (gourd) family. The difference is in their texture and taste. Winter squash have finer texture and milder flavor. Pumpkins are somewhat coarse and have stronger flavor.

Every line on the outside of a pumpkin is a row of seeds on the inside! A pumpkin has hundreds of seeds. Try counting them!

Types of winter squash include: acorn, banana, buttercup, butternut, calabaza, delicata, golden nugget, hubbard, spaghetti, sweet dumpling, and turban.

Squash has long been a staple of Native Americans' diet. It was once so important to their diet that squash were buried with the dead to provide nourishment on their final journey.

Children's Books on Pumpkins & Squash

It's Pumpkin Time
by Zoe Hall 1999

Sophie's Squash
by Roberta Grobel Intrater 2002

Too Many Pumpkins
by Linda White 1997

The Vegetables We Eat
by Gail Gibbons 2008

Winter Punches to Nut Crunches (Yummy Tummy Recipes: Seasons)
by Marilyn Lapenta 2013

Infant/Toddler Preschool – School-age

References:
Network for a Healthy California. *Harvest of the Month*. Retrieved August 21, 2013 from **www.harvestofthemonth.cdph.ca.gov**

Healthy and Active Preschoolers. *Food for Thought Curriculum: Wonderful Winter Fruits and Vegetables*. Retrieved August 21, 2013 from **www.healthypreschoolers.com/food-for-thought**