

WINTER SQUASH: FALL BEAUTY QUEENS

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By Marisa Bowe

Unloading U-boats of September cucumbers, Coop member Timo Vollbrecht from Lefferts Gardens says he's looking forward to cold weather gourds: "The squash is coming! I'm looking forward to squash time for sure."

Some of them have already arrived. Working alongside Timo, Dylan Nagler from Park Slope adds, "We do have some acorn squash and other small squash coming in."



It's that time of year again—the Coop's loaded with pumpkins!

FEASTS FOR ELEPHANTINE BEASTS

Native to the Americas, the wild ancestors of our squashes were snacks for mastodons. As *Scientific American* put in a memorable headline, “We Owe Our Pumpkins to Pooping Megafauna.” The precursors of squash were bitter, hard and horrible, so humans began tweaking them at least 10,000 years ago—and haven't stopped since.

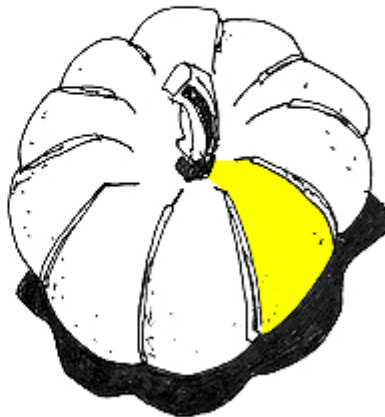
Pumpkins and acorn squash are original gourds; they've been cultivated for thousands of years. You may know what pumpkin tastes like, but be sure to choose the right kind. As produce buyer Cecelia Rembert points out, "Carving pumpkins are bred to have very little flesh. And you'd get very tired trying to carve baking pumpkins."

Both Timo and Dylan are psyched about the imminent arrival of winter squash. "Pumpkins are great once they're in season," Dylan says. "There's a lot you can do with them. Pumpkin pie, pumpkin curry."

"And pumpkin soup," adds Timo.

Acorn squash is mildly sweet and nutty, a bit fibrous and the perfect shape for stuffing.

Spaghetti squash was developed in Manchuria in the 1890s from the kabocha winter squash that Portuguese explorers brought from Brazil to Asia in the 1500s. It's an outlier in a couple of ways: it has a mild, not-sweet flavor, and it bakes into noodle-like strands that are beloved by carb-avoiders.



SWEET SQUASHES

Red kuri and sweet (or “sugar”) dumpling squashes, descendants of the same globe--traveling kabocha, were introduced in Japan in 1933 and 1976, respectively. Red kuri has edible skin and smooth, starchy flesh with a distinctive, sweet, chestnut-y flavor. (*Kuri* is Japanese for chestnut.) Sugar dumpling is (no surprise), one of the sweetest squashes, with edible skin and a creamy, smooth texture a lot like a sweet potato.

CORNELL’S ROLE

The delicata was introduced in New York in 1894, and improved in the late 1990s at Cornell University. It has a thin, edible skin and sweet, velvety flesh.

Butternut was developed in Massachusetts in the 1940s. It has a creamy texture with a mildly sweet, nutty and buttery flavor; and butterscotch-y, maple syrup-y notes.

Carnival came along in 1991, developed by a New York plant breeder. It shares most of the butternut squash flavor characteristics but is sweeter and far better looking.

The Coop carries two recent “designer” hybrids. Honeynut hit the market in 2011. It was bred specifically for deliciousness by Cornell plant professors over 30 years, then refined for a couple more with the aid of a star New York chef. It’s essentially a smaller, more concentrated butternut, with a similar nutty flavor and a smooth texture, but it’s sweeter and richer, with edible skin.

The following year, the two collaborators released Robin’s koginut, a squash with a silky, creamy texture, edible skin and a flavor profile with orange and vanilla notes that people rave about.