

What to do With the Big Green Monster?

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It is an old joke that this time of year people must lock their cars to avoid being the recipients of too much of a good thing. Summer squash—large or small, green or yellow, straight or crooked—is prolific and often floods a kitchen with its abundance.

If you have successfully avoided the many pests and diseases that affect the family of plants known as “cucurbits”—melons, cucumbers, pumpkins, winter and summer squash—you may now have some very prolific plants. Eventually, mildews, leaf rot, bacteria, viruses, or frost will kill off the plants (consider planting resistant varieties next year—or changing the weather pattern), so you want to harvest and use as much as the fruit as possible or figure out a way to store it.

Any cookbook with an emphasis on vegetables or seasonal dishes will have a section on summer squash. There are recipes for soups, salads, casseroles, stir fries, fritters, breads, cakes; the list is long. Summer squash is fairly bland by itself, and can be used as a healthy substitute for pasta, or sautéed with onions or other more strongly flavored vegetables for a side dish.

Now, what to do with the extra? With a little ingenuity and some basic kitchen skills, squash can be frozen, dried or canned to be enjoyed year-round. You will find many uses for it as an additive to soups and stews, as well as having a special ingredient for some really moist chocolate cake in the middle of winter.

Squash meant to be frozen in chunks should be blanched first, then packed in bags for use in soups and stews. If you take time to roast the squash in a pan with spices and savory vegetables, it can be frozen as a spread or dip. If you plan to use it in a baked product, you can grate the squash and freeze it without blanching (the thawed product will have about 1/3 its volume when drained).

Squash can be made into relishes and canned or frozen like pickles. Pickles made from squash will not be as crisp as those made from cucumbers, but shredded zucchini mixed with onion, peppers, spices, sugar, and vinegar make a fabulous sweet relish. Follow canning directions carefully.

If you have a dehydrator, you can shred and dehydrate the squash for future use as thickener in soups and stews. You can dry it in various forms—cubes, matchsticks, “noodles”—for rehydrating later. If you store your dried squash in the freezer (it takes up much less room that way) you don’t have to worry about exactly how dry you get it. If you store it at room temperature, dry it down further and use a vacuum sealer bag.

The monster zucchini of the title is best used in baked goods—peel it, take the seeds out, and shred the rest. If all else fails, find someone with chickens. The birds love to peck out the seeds and flesh and will lay better eggs as a result.