October kicks off the beginning of fall

As the nights are getting longer and the weather is cooling, what better way to enjoy the seasonal change than with delicious winter squash?

Many of us will start the fall off with carving pumpkins that will adorn our tables and porches. However, there are a slew of other winter squashes to be tried. Stores and farms are now offering a wide variety of winter squashes in addition to the decorative assortment.

Winter squashes are a rich source of nutrients including potassium and vitamin A, and they are low in calories.

- Potassium helps with lowering blood pressure and muscle cramps.
- In a one cup serving, potassium is equivalent in both bananas and winter squash. However, per serving, winter squash has fewer calories than bananas.
- Vitamin A helps with vision and improved immune functions.
- In a one cup serving, vitamin A is equal in both carrots and winter squash.

Helpful tips on the varieties offered

Acorn - The skin is hard and dark green. This can be roasted with brown sugar and butter for a sweet taste or with butter sage for a more savory alternative.

Butternut - This is the best all purpose squash. It has a long straight neck with a round bottom. Try it in pie.

Kabocha (or Japanese pumpkin) - It is round and flat with a dark green skin. When cooked the flesh is sweet.

Sweet Dumpling squash (as seen in picture) - The flesh is sweet and dry like a potato.

Delicata - These are oblong, and primarily white with green specks. They tastes like corn and the skin is edible.
Preparation & Storage Tips

- Cut open and scoop out seeds and stringy matter. Peeling the skin off is optional.
- If cutting the squash is challenging, bake whole until soft, then cut and prepare.
- Winter squash can be prepared any number of ways. Most common are steaming, roasting or baking.
- Winter squash can be stored in a cool dark well ventilated place for up to six months.
- Pre-cut squash can be stored in the refrigerator for two to three days.

Recipe (Courtesy of Mathieu Palombino Chef-Owner of Motorino)

Roasted Kabocha Squash

1 kabocha squash, 2 1/2 to 3 pounds
1 garlic clove, chopped
1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper
2 cups balsamic vinegar, reduced to 1/2 cup
2 ounces Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese
1/2 bunch fresh oregano

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Split the squash lengthwise; remove seeds and skin. Slice the squash into ½-inch-thick pieces. Place them in a large bowl. Add the garlic and half the olive oil, and season with salt and pepper. Toss until well coated.

Arrange squash on a sheet pan so that the pieces are not touching. Roast them for about 20 to 30 minutes or until lightly browned on top and well browned on bottom. Let cool for about 15 minutes, then arrange on a plate. Drizzle with balsamic reduction, and shave the Parmigiano-Reggiano on top. Garnish with a few oregano leaves and a drizzle of olive oil. Serves 4 to 6 as an appetizer or side.