

Stunningly Salacious Butternut Squash

For Two

Butternut squash is my favourite winter squash. As opposed to summer squash like courgette and marrow they have a harder skin which is usually not eaten. Our beloved pumpkin is a winter squash as well.

And well, a lot of people don't like them that much - at least for consumption - which may lie in the fact that they often get pickled or made into rather mild dishes which brings out the sweetness of the vegetable.

My stunningly salacious butternut squash is a spicy enterprise which turns the flesh of the squash into a nutty flavoured mashed potato consistency topped with ... well, that is the trick:



Everything you like, really!

However, here is my favourite version! I like it as main course and then I prefer medium sized squash to get a reasonably big hole into them for the filling, but as a side dish two small halves each person are alright.

It is a good dish for party invitations as it can be prepared and kept in the fridge. Only pop it into the oven an hour before the guests arrive. That gives you a lot of freedom to get the other preparations done.

As for the chillies: You can use chilli powder, but that will just make it hot. With putting in the effort to use fresh hot chillies of a bit fleshier variety you will get a wonderful aroma and only very little heat.

You need:

Preheated oven 160 C (320F)
Baking tray

3 medium or 4 small butternut squash
250g Feta cheese (from ewes milk)
1 onion
2 chillies
olive oil
ground cheddar

Spices:

1 tsp roasted sesame seed
2 tsp dried basil
1 1/2 tsp coriander powder
1/2 tsp turmeric
1/2 tsp kalonji (black onion seed)
1/2 tsp black ground pepper

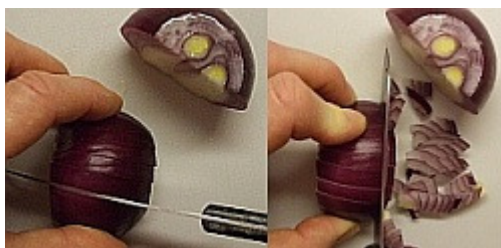
If you like it hot: a bit of chilli powder or [spiced olive oil](#)



Good for parties
Side or main dish
Preparation: 1/2 hour
Baking: 1 hour

Preparing the Filling

Pour a good pool of Olive Oil - well, that is the only sinful thing in this recipe - and mix in the spices.



Everything needs to be rather finely chopped, otherwise it's hard to get the squashes filled.

Peel and half the onions, hold the half tight, slice one direction and then the other. I like red onion, but any other will do as well.



For Feta I use the prepackaged which is always a bit slippery when it comes out of the foil. So I give it a brief rinse under cold water, dry it with a bit of kitchen roll and then cut small cubes. I use a cheese knife - bless the inventor. Any cheese is cut so easily without sticking to the knife.



Now the task of chopping the chillies. I got rather skilled using fork and knife. Otherwise definitely use gloves (best are the silicon ones usually used for DIY). And if you have kids or pets be careful not to have the seeds popping around.

Since I am only after the aroma and not the heat I remove every single seed. As long as the flesh is uncooked they are burning hot, but after being cooked for an hour all the heat will be gone. At least from the stuff that you can buy from the supermarkets.

Only on year I had home-grown ones which can burn holes into tables. I use them for the spiced oil now.



So finely chop the chillies to get the flavour evenly distributed in the mix.



Now the squashes get washed, dried, chopped the stalk off, halved, de-seeded and then a bit carved to make the hole bigger for the filling.



The leftover fleshy bits - not the seeds - get finely chopped and mixed in with the Feta and the spices. Some people use the seeds as well, but I don't like them, so I leave them out.





Pop the filled squashes on a baking tray - no need to grease the tray - and grind a bit of cheddar on top.

Off they go into the preheated oven and an hour later there they are:



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And as I said: They can be filled with anything. I could imagine that sweet pepper powder, a bit of ground cumin, cumin seeds, mustard seed, oregano, nutmeg, fennel seed would work nicely, depending on what the rest of your filling is.

Leek, carrot, broccoli, peppers, tomatoes are an option and I could even imagine a mince meat - veggie mix, or parmesan instead of cheddar.

And test your oven! I have a fan oven and 160C is perfect for medium sized squash. More and the cheese would burn, less and the squash would not be done. If you are unsure, have them without cheese sprinkle for the first half hour, then add it and observe. You can always turn up the heat for a bit towards the end to brown the cheese.

If everything fails and the squashes are not done while the cheese is getting dark already, pop them on a microwavable plate and finish them off in the microwave. Then put them back into the oven for another few minutes to make them crisp again.

Be adventurous and enjoy!