Cultural Insight: Summer Squash

Summer squash is typically from the species Cucurbita Pepo, and is eaten extensively around the world. (1) Indigenous to Central America and Mexico, it has become a staple in many cultures and traditions. (2,3)

- Four main varieties: yellow squash, green zucchini, pattypan, cousa (4)
- The flowers are edible and can be stuffed or battered and fried (4)
- Grown in warm, frost free climates (5)
- Picked when immature (4)
- One of the oldest known crops, dating back 10,000 years (6)

How is summer squash eaten around the world?

Try this recipe!

Squash Casserole

In the American south, zucchini and squash are typically incorporated into a casserole dish with breadcrumbs and cheese.

Recipe adapted from allrecipes.com

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F (200 degrees C).

Sautee squash and onion in a large skillet over medium heat. Pour in a small amount of water. Cover, and cook until squash is tender, about 5 minutes. Drain well, and place in a large bowl.

In a medium bowl, mix together cracker crumbs and cheese. Stir half of the cracker mixture into the cooked squash and onions.

In a small bowl, mix together eggs and milk, then add to squash mixture. Stir in 1/4 cup melted butter, and season with salt and pepper. Spread into a 9x13 inch baking dish. Sprinkle with remaining cracker mixture, and dot with 2 tablespoons butter.

Bake in preheated oven for 25 minutes, or until lightly browned.

In Korean Cuisine, zucchini (known as aehobak in the Korean language) is often used in many dishes, including stews, side dishes and pickles. Unlike most summer squash, the Korean variety belongs to the species Cucurbita Moschata (1,7). Doenjang jigae (pictured to the right) is among the most popular stews in Korea, often containing soybean paste and various vegetables such as aehobak.
Indigenous to Central America and Mexico (2,3), squash has subtle flavors, allowing it to take on the flavors of various spices and seasonings. A traditional Mexican side-dish, Calabacitas con elote (little squash with corn), is often accompanied with chilies, garlic and oregano.

In Poland, patty pan squash is typically pickled in a sweet, vinegar brine, similar to sweet cucumber pickles.

While summer squash has its roots in the Americas, the squash that we know so well today did not develop in its indigenous home in the Americas. (6) The modern immature squash took form in Italy. While the ancient versions of squash had prominent seeds and a small amount of bitter flesh, the new-age Italian squash and zucchini have tender seeds and sweeter flesh.

In Italy, a popular preparation method involves frying battered, zucchini flowers to create fritters. They may be stuffed or served alongside various dipping sauces.

Global Fact: Some of the largest producers of squash include China, Italy, Argentina and Egypt. (6)