Enjoy the Versatile Spaghetti Squash

By Janet Hackert, Regional Nutrition and Health Education Specialist

Spaghetti squash – is it a main dish to be served with tomato sauce and meatballs or a vegetable to be served with a little olive oil and sprinkled with rosemary? The answer is yes and yes! This versatile squash has the nutritional value associated with vegetables along with the texture of its strands that give it its name and make it a great pasta substitute.

Like other vegetables, spaghetti squash has few calories and fat but does contain fiber and other carbohydrates. In one-half cup of cooked spaghetti squash there are just 40 calories and only 1 gram of fat but 3 grams of fiber and 9 grams of carbohydrates. It even has 1 gram of protein. And it contains some Vitamin C, potassium and Vitamin A.

Select a spaghetti squash that is ripe and ready for use. According to MU Extension’s online app (found at http://seasonalandsimple.info) winter squash like spaghetti squash should be harvested or purchased when it “feels heavy for its size; the skin should have a dull sheen and be intact and hard.” Store in a cool, dry place for up to two months.

Squash can be prepared in a number of ways – baked in the oven or in the microwave, boiled or cooked in a crock pot. More specific directions on how to do this can be found at http://extension.missouri.edu in an article by Nutrition Specialist Tammy Roberts, called How to Prepare Spaghetti Squash. The interesting thing about spaghetti squash is its texture. The seeds of this squash are removed like other winter squashes. But when it is cooked, the pulp of a spaghetti squash becomes stringy and very similar to spaghetti strands. Its flavor is very different though.

Although it is not recommended to can squash, it can be frozen. Cook, then cool the squash by removing its pulp from the rind and placing in freezer containers. Place these in cold water till cool. Store in quantities that are ready for serving or using in recipes. Add a little extra to make up for moisture that will come out during the process. Full details can be found in the MU Extension publication GH1503 Quality for Keeps: Freezing Vegetables.

Other versatile winter squashes that are commonly found are butternut and acorn squash. With their darker yellow or orange color, these two have even more Vitamin A. Recipes for using winter squash can also be found at the Seasonal and Simple online app. Recipes include spaghetti squash with parmesan cheese, acorn squash with brown sugar, butternut squash and apple bake, and wonderful winter squash. At http://missourifamilies.org there is also a recipe for chili with butternut squash and olives.

For more information on spaghetti squash, other winter squashes or any other topic, contact me, Janet Hackert, at 660-425-6434 or HackertJ@missouri.edu or your local University of Missouri Extension office.

(Written 10/3/14)