

Squashing Tradition

Squash has a long history in the South. Along with beans and corn, the gourds were the foundation of Native American foodways, and have remained popular in the South for their abundant growing seasons. Squash’s relatively neutral flavor is easily transformed, making it an ideal candidate for casserole. Kahlil Arnold of Arnold’s Country Kitchen keeps it simple with a cornbread crumble topping, ensuring squash is the star. On the contrary, Maneet Chauhan eschews tradition in favor of Indian spices and fresh herbs in her interpretation of squash casserole. —Lia Grabowski



SQUASH CASSEROLE

KAHLIL ARNOLD OF ARNOLD’S COUNTRY KITCHEN, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

For the casserole:

- 4 pounds crookneck yellow squash, cut into medium rounds
- 1 large yellow onion, chopped
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 tablespoons salt
- 1 teaspoon ground white pepper
- 4 tablespoons chicken stock

For the topping:

- 6 cups crumbled dry cornbread
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup melted butter
- ¼ cup paprika

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease a 9x13-inch baking dish. Place chopped squash and onions in a medium pot. Add enough water to cover squash and onions about halfway, about 6 to 8 cups. Boil on medium heat for 20 to 30 minutes, until squash and onions are tender. Drain in colander and press out excess water with a wooden spoon.
2. Pour squash mixture into a mixing bowl. Add sugar, salt, pepper, and chicken stock. Stir, and add additional salt, pepper, and chicken stock to taste. Place mixture into greased baking dish.
3. Mix all topping ingredients in a bowl, then pour evenly over squash. Bake for 30 to 45 minutes, until top begins to brown.

Serves 6-8



Kahlil Arnold of Arnold’s Country Kitchen, a Nashville meat-and-three of more than thirty years, serves up a nostalgia-inducing casserole. The slightly sweet cornbread topping plays well with the buttery nuttiness of crookneck squash, while still preserving its flavor. For best results, choose young squash for their thin skin and firm texture.

Owner of Nashville’s Chauhan Ale & Masala House and frequent judge on Food Network’s *Chopped*, Maneet Chauhan is an authority on Indian-fusion cuisine. Using kabocha—a winter squash with a sweet flavor and fluffy texture—as a vessel, she layers cashew- and raisin-studded rice with masala-spiced butternut squash for a next-level take on traditional squash casserole.



KABOCHA SQUASH BIRYANI CASSEROLE

MANEET CHAUHAN OF CHAUHAN ALE & MASALA HOUSE, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

For the squash:

- 1 medium kabocha squash
- Olive oil
- Salt
- Garam masala

For the rice:

- 4 teaspoons coconut oil
- 1 cup basmati rice (Chauhan recommends Royal brand)
- 1 cup whole raw cashews
- ⅓ cup golden raisins
- 1 (6-inch) cinnamon stick, broken in half
- 5 whole green cardamom pods
- 6 whole cloves
- Salt
- ¼ teaspoon saffron, soaked in 2 tablespoons milk for 10 minutes
- 2 cups water

For the vegetables:

- 1 tablespoon coconut oil
- 1 cup chopped yellow onion
- 3 tablespoons whole cumin seeds
- 1 tablespoon grated ginger
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons biryani masala (Chauhan recommends Shan brand)
- 2 tablespoons dried fenugreek leaves
- ½ cup tomato puree
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 cups cauliflower florets
- 2 cups cubed butternut squash
- 1 cup water

To finish:

- ¼ teaspoon saffron, soaked in 2 tablespoons milk for 10 minutes
- 1 cup crispy fried onions
- 1 tablespoon chopped cilantro
- 1 tablespoon chopped mint

1. Prepare the squash: Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Cut top off kabocha squash and scoop out seeds. Place squash on a baking sheet, drizzle with olive oil, and sprinkle with salt and garam masala. Roast for 10 to 15 minutes. Set aside.
2. Make the rice: Heat a saucepan over medium heat, then add coconut oil. Add all ingredients except water and sauté briefly. Add water and bring to a boil. Stir once, then cover with a tight-fitting lid. Reduce heat to low and simmer until rice is tender, about 15 to 20 minutes. Remove from heat and let sit, covered, for 10 minutes. Fluff rice with a fork and remove cinnamon sticks, cardamom pods, and cloves.
3. Make the vegetables: In a large skillet, heat coconut oil. Add onion and sauté until it begins to brown. Add cumin seeds, ginger, garlic, biryani masala, fenugreek leaves, tomato puree, and salt. Cook, stirring constantly, for 1 minute. Add remaining ingredients and stir to combine. Bring to a boil, then cover and cook until vegetables are tender, about 4 minutes. Remove cover and cook until most of the liquid has evaporated.
4. To assemble: In the kabocha squash, alternate layers of rice and vegetables. Top with saffron milk and crispy fried onions. Put kabocha lid back on squash and roast in the oven for 10 to 15 minutes. Garnish with cilantro and mint.

Serves 4

