

Peppered Squash Gratin

Serves 6—8

This gratin is my favorite thing on the table this year, a shock to everyone including me. The crushed garlic and salty parmesan really curb the sweetness of the squash while the cream, absorbing into it to completely tenderize while also caramelizing around the edges for texture, brings it back ever-so-slightly. It's a really magical combination. I've made it three times since I made it the first time and it's not even Thanksgiving yet. This is also just a really good side dish, holiday or not. I hope you print this one out and eat it all winter long. Please don't forget to add so much pepper — it's in the name!

The hardest part of this recipe is dealing with the squash — always a challenge no matter how skilled you are (you're not alone if you struggle! I struggle). But do your best. Peel the squash using a regular peeler and don't worry about bits of skin still attached (or don't peel and eat the skin). Use a sharp knife and cut it on a sturdy, stable work surface. Once you've broken through and sliced the squash, the rest is easy and impossible to mess up (layer with parmesan, garlic, salt and pepper. Cover with cream. Bake until tender and brown, eat).

Ingredients

5 lbs. squash such as butternut, acorn or kabocha, peeled, seeded, sliced 1/4" thick

4 ounces parmesan, grated (about 1 cup)

8 cloves garlic, very well smashed, coarsely chopped or thinly sliced

Kosher salt, so much freshly ground black pepper

Crushed red pepper flakes (optional)

4–6 sprigs sage or 2–3 tablespoons thyme, rosemary or oregano leaves

1 cup heavy cream

2 tablespoons butter or olive oil, plus more olive oil

Instructions

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1. Preheat oven to 425°F/220°C (no fan). Layer squash, parmesan, garlic and sage leaves (or other herbs) in a 1.5–2 qt. baking dish, seasoning each layer with salt, LOTS of pepper, and crushed red pepper flakes, if you like.
 2. Cover with heavy cream and finish with another good sprinkle of parmesan, a good crack of black pepper and a few more leaves of herbs over top. Dot with a few knobs of butter or a drizzle of olive oil and cover with foil. Cover with foil and pop in the oven and bake until squash is totally tender and cooked through, 30–35 minutes.
 3. Remove foil and continue baking until top is nicely browned and cream is thickened and caramelized around the edges, another 30–35 minutes. Remove from oven and let cool slightly before eating (should be served warm, though).

DO AHEAD: You can make this ahead up until step 2 a few hours ahead. To serve, proceed at step 3. Alternatively, you can just make the recipe all the way through, and when it comes time to eat it, reheat at 425°F/220°C until warmed through.

LEFTOVERS: This is shockingly good cold. I could also see this warmed up in the oven or microwave with a fried (but runny) egg in the morning.