Spaghetti squash has a fun surprise inside. Rake a fork across the coarse interior of a cooked spaghetti squash and you can’t help but smile as the long strands pull apart to form a mound of squash noodles!

Fall is the time of year when spaghetti squash and other members of the winter squash family begin to make their appearance in the market. Grown in the height of the summer season, they are harvested in October. The ‘winter’ in their name comes from the time of year when we eat them. Also called keepers, winter squash will keep for months when stored in dry conditions at a temperature of 50° to 55°.

A golden-yellow shell on the outside is a sign of a fully ripe spaghetti squash. If it’s white, it’s not ripe. A few scuff marks are to be expected from a squash that’s been on the vine for months, but soft spots are unacceptable. Take home a large one — the bigger spaghetti squash have the most flavor.

You can store spaghetti squash on your countertop for up to a month before moving it to cold storage. When you’re ready to eat it, scrub the exterior, poke it in several places with the tines of a fork (don’t skip this step or it will explode in your oven) and place it on a baking sheet in a moderately hot oven (325° to 375°) for an hour or so until it feels soft to the touch. Let it cool a bit, cut it open, scoop out the seeds and discard. With a fork, gently pull the strands of squash away from the outer peel and place the squash strands into a mixing bowl.

Heat a skillet. Add the olive oil, spaghetti squash, herbs, salt and pepper and toss thoroughly, but gently to heat and combine. After squash is warmed add in the butter and toss again. Serve immediately or cover and keep warm until ready to serve. Do not hold for more than a half hour as the squash will begin to soften.

Baked Fresh Herb Spaghetti Squash

Recipe developed by Corporate Chef Kurt Kwiatkowski and featured in Residential Dining Services. Serves 4

- 1 Spaghetti Squash (about 2 1/2 pounds)
- 1 Tablespoon Butter
- 1 Tablespoon Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- 2 Tablespoon + 1 teaspoon Mixed Thyme, Parsley, Sage and Chives (chopped)
- 1 teaspoon Salt
- 1/2 teaspoon Freshly Ground Black Pepper

Preheat the oven to 350°. Using a sharp knife, cut the squash in half lengthwise and place in a baking dish cut side down. Add a 1/2-inch of water into the baking dish and cover with aluminum foil. Bake for 45 minutes until the squash can be easily pierced with a paring knife. Turn squash over and cover with foil again, continue to cook another 15 minutes until the squash is very tender. Remove from the oven, uncover and allow to cool slightly. Using a spoon remove the seeds and discard. With a fork, gently pull the strands of squash away from the outer peel and place the squash strands into a mixing bowl.

Heat a skillet. Add the olive oil, spaghetti squash, herbs, salt and pepper and toss thoroughly, but gently to heat and combine. After squash is warmed add in the butter and toss again. Serve immediately or cover and keep warm until ready to serve. Do not hold for more than a half hour as the squash will begin to soften.

Baked Fresh Herb Spaghetti Squash will be served for lunch at McDonel, Riverwalk Market at Owen Hall, Yakeley, Wonders, The Gallery at Snyder/Phillips and Brody Square on October 21. Visit www.eatatstate.com for dining hall hours and menus.

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