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Does Your Garden Runneth Over with Zucchini?

This article was written by Nancy Frecks, Extension Educator in Hitchcock, Hayes, and Dundy Counties.

It is garden time, which means it is time for zucchini plants to start producing, A LOT! There are tales of people leaving sacks of zucchini on porches or even in unlocked cars just so they can get rid of the abundance of their crop. One gardener recently told me that they believed a zucchini could grow 12 inches in a day! These tales might or might not be true, but it is true this time of year zucchini are available, in every size you can imagine.

Zucchini is actually just a small yellow or green summer squash that is shaped like a cucumber. Whether picking or purchasing choose firm, slender zucchini with a bright green color and free of wrinkled skin and soft spots. They should be about 6 to 8 inches long and about 2 inches in diameter. As zucchini gets longer and bigger around, it becomes tougher and develops more seeds. These larger zucchini can be used to make zucchini bread. Scoop out seeds and pulp with the tip of a spoon and shred to use in bread. Store unwashed zucchini in perforated plastic bags in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator and be sure to wash zucchini just before preparation.

There are many ways to prepare zucchini to eat. You can steam it, fry it, bread it, or grill it. Zucchini is delicious eaten raw either plain or dipped in your favorite dip or added to salads. Zucchini is great when grilled or incorporated into stir-fry dishes. Try slicing, marinating them in your favorite marinade and then grilling. Cut into sticks or slices and add to stir-fry dishes. Try grating or slicing and adding a layer of zucchini to your favorite casserole or meatloaf recipe. One favorite is to slice and then cut in half, lightly sauté, add tomatoes or tomato sauce, and top with cheese. Any way you cook zucchini, it's healthy and delicious!

The traditional favorite is zucchini bread. It is a delicious type of quick bread that is sweet and moist. The primary ingredient in zucchini bread is of course zucchini, but you can also add various other ingredients. Many people like to add dried cranberries, orange zest, or cinnamon. Zucchini bread is a great recipe for beginning cooks because it is so easy to make. If you don't have a favorite zucchini bread recipe, search for one on the internet or in one of your favorite cookbooks.

For more information, contact your local Nebraska Extension Office and ask for a copy of the Zucchini Bread Cook It Quick newsletter or on the web at: food.unl.edu/what-do-zucchini#quick Nebraska Extension is a responsive, innovative, and trusted information source for all Nebraskans.