

ON THE SIDE Glazed Butternut Squash

A sweet glaze underlines the best qualities of roasted butternut squash, but only if the squash cooks evenly and the flavors are in balance. BY KRIS WIDICAN



One-inch chunks browned nicely without taking forever.

APPLYING A SWEET GLAZE to roasted butternut squash should intensify the vegetable's flavor and encourage it to caramelize and brown. But many of the recipes I tested produced sodden, sticky mashes of squash swimming in syrupy-sweet glazes, or worse, squash that barely cooked through before the glaze incinerated.

For the sweet element of the glaze, tasters preferred the complexity and depth of dark brown sugar to plain white sugar. I tried adding shallots, garlic, thyme, parsley, and chives, but my tasters were emphatic that, in this case, less was more: Salt and pepper perked up the squash without overwhelming it, and a little melted butter added nutty richness and tied the glaze together.

I knew that how I cut the squash would affect how it caramelized in the oven. I tested sizes and shapes from slender batons to hulking half-moons before settling on 1-inch cubes, which had enough surface area to brown well yet were small enough to cook to full tenderness in a reasonable 45 minutes. On impulse, after the squash came out of the oven, I reached for a bottle of cider vinegar, hoping a splash would counter the sweetness of the glaze and give the dish some zing. A mere teaspoon brought the needed brightness to this simple side dish.

BROWN SUGAR-GLAZED BUTTERNUT SQUASH

Serves 4 to 6

We like the deeper flavor of dark brown sugar in this recipe, but light brown sugar can be substituted.

- 1 butternut squash (about 2½ pounds), peeled, halved lengthwise, seeded, and cut into 1-inch chunks
- ¼ cup packed dark brown sugar (see note)
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- 1 teaspoon cider vinegar

1. PREPARE PAN Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 425 degrees. Line rimmed baking sheet with aluminum foil and coat lightly with cooking spray.

2. ROAST Toss squash, sugar, butter, salt, and pepper in large bowl until well coated. Transfer squash to prepared baking sheet. Roast, stirring every 15 minutes, until squash is well browned and completely tender, about 45 minutes. Transfer pan to wire rack, sprinkle squash with vinegar, and stir to coat. Serve.