



Honeynut: How a Star Chef and a Plant Breeder Made the Perfect Squash for Roasting

By Mary Margaret Chappell
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In Brief

- Honeynut squash is a chef- and scientist-developed mini butternut: sweet, compact, and with edible skin so no peeling is needed.
- Learn how to pick ripe ones, store them properly, and roast them to caramelized perfection—**read on for the full article.**

What do you get when a scientist and a star chef collaborate on a new variety of [butternut squash](#)? Honeynut: the butternut hybrid that's smaller, denser, and more concentrated in flavor. Here's the scoop on how the Honeynut came to be the vegetable phenomenon it is today, plus tips on how to select, store, and prep the sweet, petite autumn gourds.

The History of Honeynut Squash

Honeynut squash's story starts back in the 1980s, when Cornell professor and vegetable breeder Richard W. Robinson first developed the miniature butternut varietal. Back then, people expected winter squash to be big, so there wasn't much market for smaller varieties, no matter how innovative they were or how good they tasted.

Fast-forward to 2009: Dan Barber, the chef-owner of Michelin-starred Blue Hill in New York, featured roasted Honeynut squash on a menu he prepared for Cornell faculty members, including associate professor and plant breeder Michael Mazourek.

"Blue Hill was roasting the squash very hot to embrace the Maillard reactions that sensory scientists avoid in their studies," Mazourek recalls. "It opened my eyes to the interaction of technique with flavor. ... That dinner with Dan changed how I looked at breeding vegetables." Mazourek set out to develop an even more delicious version, with a more concentrated flavor.

What Makes Honeynut Squash so Great?

There's a lot to love about Honeynut 2.0 (as Mazourek refers to today's Honeynut varieties). The handheld size makes it easy to prepare and serve. Its sweet, smooth, colorful flesh is luscious in pies, soups, and mashes. And unlike regular butternut squash, Honeynut has thin skin that's edible once roasted, meaning you don't have to peel it. (If you do prefer it peeled, the skin slips off easily after roasting.)

Seasonality

Just like other specialty squash (including [delicata](#)), honeynuts are harvested in early fall and are at peak flavor and availability September through November. When Honeynut squash isn't available, you can look for its cousins (also hybrids developed by Cornell), Brûlée and 898. Brûlée squash boasts extended storage times (6 months or more), so it may be easier to find after Honeynuts have gone out of season.

Selection and Storage

Honeynut squash's skin turns from deep green to a rich honey hue as it matures, making it easy to find perfectly ripe specimens at the farmers market or in the supermarket produce section.

Choose Honeynut squash that are uniformly golden in color with smooth, unblemished skin. Wrinkled skin is a sign the squash is past its prime and beginning to dry out.

All mini-butternut varieties will keep for a month or more when stored in a cool, dry place. Keep cut and cooked squash in the fridge, but avoid refrigerating

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squash when it's still whole. The refrigerator's humid environment can promote mold development on the Honeynut's thin skin. Sliced and cubed honeynut squash can also be frozen.

How to Roast Honeynut Squash

Honeynut squash was literally developed to be roasted, and roasting remains Mazourek's prep method of choice. Roasted Honeynut halves are delicious on their own, and the flesh can be used in any recipe that calls for mashed, puréed, or even canned pumpkin or squash. Here's how to roast it.

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F. Halve the squash and scoop out the seeds.
2. Place the squash cut sides up on a baking sheet. Cover loosely with foil. Roast 25 to 30 minutes or until fork-tender. Uncover and continue roasting until browned.
3. To scoop flesh, let squash cool slightly and then slide the edge of a spoon between the skin and the flesh.

Our Favorite Ways to Cook Honeynut Squash

Honeynut squash's petite size and edible skin make it an especially good option for stuffed squash dishes. Honeynuts can be used interchangeably with other types of winter squash (except spaghetti squash) in most recipes. Here are a few of our favorites to try.

- [Sage Lentil Stew with Squash and Mushrooms](#)
- [Winter Squash Soup with Pistachio Gremolata](#)
- [Pumpkin and Red Lentil Dal](#)
- [Delicata Squash Tacos](#)
- [Roasted Red Pepper and Squash Soup with Chickpeas](#)
- [Butternut Squash Mac and Cheese with Broccoli](#)

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