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EXTENSION

Family Matters

Improving Health Together

August 2023 Newsletter

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Fun and Tasty Ways to Use all that Zucchini and get Kids in the Kitchen By Laura Griffin, CSU Extension Specialist, Pueblo County



Zucchini is a summer staple that can help kids get involved in both the garden and the kitchen. Fortunately, zucchini is a variety of squash that is relatively easy to grow providing large amounts of produce. It can be used in a wide variety of recipes. While zucchini will do best grown in an outdoor garden, it is possible to also grow in a patio container garden. If growing zucchini at home is not possible, it is also readily available at the grocery store or local farmer's market and is inexpensive to purchase. Zucchini has a wide range of health benefits. It is rich in vitamin C, potassium, and magnesium. It is also an excellent source of fiber, which aids in healthy digestion.

How to Prepare Zucchini

Zucchini can be eaten with any meal of the day. Get creative when trying new zucchini recipes!

For breakfast:

- Try adding sautéed zucchini to your scrambled eggs or omelet.
- Bake a fresh batch of zucchini muffins. These can also be frozen for an easy breakfast or snack to thaw out later.
- Zucchini pancakes are a fun and savory pancake option which can be served with sour cream, salsa, chives, or green onions.



For lunch or dinner:

- Try roasting, grilling, or sautéing zucchini for an easy side dish with any meal.
- Substitute zucchini noodles in your favorite pasta dish.
- Try making zucchini fries as an easy side dish or snack. Dip the zucchini in egg, followed by panko breadcrumbs and fry or bake. They can also be cooked in an air fryer.



Expectations for Kids in the Kitchen:

- The younger the child, the shorter the attention span. Try to select quick and easy jobs for them to complete such as rinsing produce, measuring ingredients, and mixing ingredients together.
- Older children may be able to help with reading the recipe and using simple kitchen tools such as a can opener or hand mixer.
- Children need constant supervision in the kitchen. When introducing new utensils or appliances, teach them how to use them in a safe manner.
- Expect spills and messes to happen. Let children be part of the clean up process as part of their kitchen duties.

Helping families increase physical activity and enjoy healthy foods ...

Let's Talk

Children learn best when they are actively involved and can enjoy what they are doing. Kids learn by involving their senses of touch, taste, feel, smell, and sound. All of these can be incorporated in the kitchen when they are stirring, mixing, pouring, etc. Cooking also creates a final product children can take pride in knowing they helped create, which helps to increase confidence and instill responsibility.

Recipe for Health

Zucchini Boats

Yield: 8 Boats

Ingredients:

- 4 medium zucchinis
- 1 Tablespoon olive or vegetable oil for rubbing on Zucchini
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- Black pepper, ground
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano, divided
- 14 to 16 ounces standard Italian sausage (or substitute ground beef, ground turkey or plant-based sausage)
- 1-2 garlic cloves, minced
- 15-ounce can of fire roasted crushed tomatoes
- 6 Tablespoons grated or shredded Parmesan cheese, divided
- ½ cup grated mozzarella cheese
- 2 Tablespoons panko breadcrumbs (or gluten-free breadcrumbs)



Directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 425°F.
2. Wash hands and food contact surfaces with soap and water.
3. Rinse zucchini under cool running water, and pat dry.
4. Cut off the stem ends of the zucchini. Cut each in half lengthwise and scoop out the insides with a spoon: you'll want a thin edge around the outside of the boat. (Discard the pulp or use it in smoothies or for another purpose.)
5. Place the boats on a baking sheet and rub each with a bit of olive oil. Then sprinkle all 8 boats with a mixture of, ¼ teaspoon salt, ½ teaspoon oregano and fresh ground black pepper, divided between the boats.
6. Place the sausage in a medium skillet and cook according to the package instructions, 2 to 3 minutes for plant-based and 6 to 7 for regular sausage (drain any excess fat after cooking).
7. Add the garlic to the pan with the sausage and cook 30 seconds, then add the tomatoes, ½ teaspoon dried oregano. Cook 5-6 minutes, or until half of the excess liquid has evaporated. Stir in ¼ cup Parmesan cheese.
8. Scoop approximately ¼ cup of the filling into each zucchini boats. Top with the mozzarella cheese and the remaining 2 tablespoons Parmesan cheese. Then sprinkle with the panko.
9. Bake for 20 minutes until the cheese is melted and golden brown. Let stand for 2 minutes before serving.



If there are any leftovers, they can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 3 days, or frozen for later use in a casserole or soup (minestrone) recipe.

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