



# ZUCCHINI

## Ingredient of the Month



Presented by ACFEF Chef & Child Foundation



**Zucchini**, also known as courgette, skutasquash or green Italian squash, is a member of the Cucurbitaceae family, which includes melons, cucumbers and gourds. It is a summer squash eaten in its immature stage and although botanically a fruit, it is treated like a vegetable for culinary purposes. Zucchini grows on a small bush and is shaped like a slightly curved cylinder that ranges from four to eight inches long. It has dark-green skin with creamy-white flesh and soft seeds and can be eaten in its entirety, including the blossom. It has a delicate and slightly sweet flavor and a smooth texture. Zucchini is available year-round, but its peak season is in spring and summer.

Originally from South and Central America, today's zucchini was cultivated by the Italians in the 19th century into its

current form as a small green squash; immigrants brought this vegetable to the U.S. in the early 1920s. It is a versatile vegetable that can be enjoyed raw or cooked and can be made into a variety of foods, including breads, casseroles and desserts.

Many valuable antioxidant nutrients are found in the flesh, skin and seeds, so the whole zucchini should be consumed. It is an excellent source of manganese and vitamin K, which promote strong bones, and of vitamin C, which boosts the immune system. Zucchini contains lutein and zeaxanthin that work together to provide healthy vision and it is low in saturated fat and cholesterol. It is also a good source of vitamin B6 and potassium, which help cognitive function and the control of blood pressure, respectively.

## Healthy Ingredient Contribution

*Values from NutritionData.com based on squash, summer, zucchini, includes skin, raw 100 grams*

**ANTIOXIDANTS:** Zucchini is high in vitamins and minerals that have antioxidant properties. Antioxidants protect against free radicals that cause aging, cancer and disease. They also help support memory function and coordination.

**VITAMIN C:** One serving of zucchini contains 28 percent of the daily recommended value of vitamin C, which protects against infectious agents by strengthening the immune system. It also promotes healing and coping with stress.

**VITAMIN B6:** Zucchini provides 11 percent of the daily recommended value of vitamin B6, which helps with the formation of antibodies and in the synthesis of amino acids. It is also important in carbohydrate and fat metabolism.

**MANGANESE:** One serving of zucchini contains 9 percent of the daily recommended value of manganese. This macromineral plays an important role in the normal functioning of the nervous system and helps break down proteins and fat. It also works with vitamin K to help keep bones strong.

**RIBOFLAVIN:** Zucchini provides 8 percent of the daily recommended value of riboflavin. Riboflavin is important in the body for energy metabolism of carbohydrates, fat and protein. It also helps protect the body from free radicals.

**POTASSIUM:** One serving of zucchini contains 7 percent of the daily recommended value of potassium, which helps maintain a healthy nervous system and optimal brain function. It also aids in lowering blood pressure.

## Types and Varieties

**BABY FINGERLING ZUCCHINI** is a popular new zucchini that can be steamed, pickled or sauteed whole.

**BLACK BEAUTY** is a flavorful zucchini that freezes well. It is semi-upright with black-green skin and tender, but firm, creamy-white flesh.

**GOLDEN ZUCCHINI** has bright yellow, cylindrical skin with a delicious and distinctive flavor. It starts out yellow rather than ripening from green.

**LIMELIGHT ZUCCHINI** has a lime-green colored skin that is speckled with silver and has a creamy and rich flavor.

**ROUND ZUCCHINI** are denser and nearly seedless with smooth-textured skin. Varieties include the eight ball zucchini and ball hybrid mix. The eight ball zucchini is a hybrid that tastes buttery and nutty. It is glossy and dark green. The ball hybrid mix is sweeter and can be light green, deep green or a golden yellow.

**ZUCCHINI BLOSSOMS** should be bright flowers that have not wilted. They are extremely delicate with a short shelf life and can be eaten raw, fried or stuffed.



## Selecting and Storing

- Smaller and younger zucchini are the most flavorful. Look for small, firm and heavy zucchini. The skin should be unblemished, slightly prickly, bright and glossy, and the zucchini should have a moist stem. Softness is a sign that the zucchini should be used immediately.
- Zucchini can be stored in a plastic bag up to five days in a refrigerator. Do not wash first. Cooked zucchini should not be refrigerated for more than two days.
- Zucchini can be frozen. First, slice into rounds and blanch for a couple of minutes. Then, immerse into cold water, drain and seal into airtight containers. Frozen zucchini will be good for 10 months to a year.
- Zucchini blossoms should be stored by wrapping them gently in a paper towel before refrigerating. They should be used within 1-2 days.

## Culinary Uses

- Zucchini is an extremely versatile primary or secondary ingredient and can be steamed, fried, boiled, baked, braised, barbequed or eaten raw.
- Zucchini blossoms can be used in a number of different ways, such as fried, stuffed or raw.
- Sprinkle grated zucchini over salads, rice and pasta dishes for a crunchy bite of nutrition.
- Add to a vegetable kabob and serve with a healthy dip.
- Use a vegetable peeler or mandolin to cut the zucchini vertically into long, thin ribbons to make "pasta." Saute for a few minutes and serve with pasta sauce.

## Interesting Facts

- Christopher Columbus was the first to bring zucchini seeds to the Mediterranean region and Africa.
- Bernard Lavery of Plymouth, England, grew the world's largest zucchini on record at 69.5 inches long and 65 pounds.
- In Obetz, Ohio, there is a three-day celebration of zucchini called the Annual Zucchini Fest. Several other areas have held similar festivals.
- Zucchini has more potassium than a banana.
- Mature zucchini can be as large as a baseball bat.



American Culinary Federation  
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**AMERICAN CULINARY FEDERATION**

180 Center Place Way

St. Augustine, FL 32095

800.624.9458 | [www.acfchefs.org](http://www.acfchefs.org)