

Italian squash bake brings Mediterranean flair to dinner

By Melissa D'Arabian

This week's Italian squash bake is a true work horse. Want an easy, make-ahead weeknight side dish? This will do the trick. Hosting both vegetarians and meat eaters for dinner? Serve Italian squash bake along with grilled chicken or fish on the side for the carnivores, and you'll be all set. Since the recipe is quite flexible, you can easily make as much or as little as you need. The colors of the vegetable slices are pretty, juxtaposed against one another, making this a company-worthy recipe with zero last-minute prep. A quick note to parents:

Once you've sliced up the veggies, let your little ones do the layering - it's a great way to include them in the vegetable cookery of dinnertime. And you almost can't mess this up, aside from the aesthetics.

My daughter, who loves to help me make this, even considers it a (lightened-up) version of lasagna. She's actually not too far off. This Mediterranean-style squash bake is inspired by a tian, which is a Provençal dish named after the earthenware baking vessel traditionally used to make it.

My squash version gets its flavor from calorie-free herbs, lemon juice and garlic cloves instead, plus just enough satisfy-

ing fat from a light dusting of cheese added in the final stages of baking. Since squash only packs in about 10 calories in a half-cup serving (and surprisingly only about a gram of sugar), a little cheese is the perfect touch of comfort. Bringing Mediterranean flair to your weeknight cooking routine might be just the thing your autumn needs.



ITALIAN SQUASH BAKE

Ingredients

Start to finish: 1 hour
Servings: 4
1 medium-large zucchini, sliced
1 medium-large yellow crookneck squash, sliced
2 large shallots, sliced
2 tomatoes, sliced
5-10 garlic cloves
2 teaspoons dried Italian herb seasoning
1 tablespoon olive oil
Juice of 1/2 lemon
1/2 cup shredded mozzarella or parmesan cheese, or mixed
Salt and pepper

Preparation

Preheat oven to 375 F. Spray an 8-inch earthenware or regular baking dish with nonstick cooking spray. Season the vegetables with a little salt and pepper. Layer the squash, tomato and shallot slices "shingle style" in the dish, alternating vegetables. Don't hesitate to pack the vegetables in fairly tightly; the slices should not lay completely flat. Once the vegetables are all snugly in the baking dish, sprinkle on the garlic cloves, and dried herbs. Drizzle on the olive oil and squeeze on the lemon juice. Cover with foil and bake for a half hour. Remove the foil and continue baking for an additional half hour, sprinkling the cheese on top the last 15 minutes (for a total bake time of about an hour.) Serve warm or room temperature.