



Calabacitas is a traditional Mexican dish that brings together fresh vegetables, bold spices, and incredible flavors. The word “calabacitas” translates to “little squash,” and this dish primarily features zucchini or other varieties of squash. Whether you’re a vegetarian looking for a hearty meal or a meat lover searching for a new side dish, **calabacitas** offers a satisfying and healthy option.

This simple yet flavorful dish has been a staple in Mexican cuisine for generations. It highlights the beauty of fresh produce while embracing the rich culinary traditions of the region. Let’s explore everything about **calabacitas**, from its ingredients and preparation to expert tips for making it the best dish on your table.

Ingredients Needed for Calabacitas

To prepare a delicious **calabacitas** dish, you will need the following ingredients:

- **1.5 lbs. zucchini or other squash**, diced into bite-sized pieces
- **1 small onion**, finely chopped
- **3 garlic cloves**, minced
- **1 jalapeño**, chopped (adjust based on spice preference)
- **3 plum tomatoes**, roasted and blended
- **2 cups corn kernels** (fresh or canned, drained)
- **1 teaspoon Mexican oregano** (optional but recommended)
- **3/4 teaspoon salt**, or to taste
- **Freshly ground black pepper**, to taste
- **1 tablespoon olive oil**
- **Cotija cheese and chopped cilantro**, for garnish (optional)

Step-by-Step Guide to Making Calabacitas

1. Preparing the Ingredients

The first step in making **calabacitas** is to prepare all the ingredients. Begin by washing the zucchini and cutting them into small, even-sized pieces. Finely chop the onion, garlic, and jalapeño. If you prefer a mild dish, remove the jalapeño seeds before chopping.



2. Roasting the Tomatoes

Roasting the tomatoes enhances their natural sweetness and deepens the flavor of **calabacitas**. Place the tomatoes on a baking tray and roast them in a 400°F oven for about 20 minutes or until they develop a slight char. Once done, blend them into a smooth sauce and set aside.

3. Sautéing the Onion and Garlic

Heat a tablespoon of olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the chopped onion and sauté for about 7-10 minutes, or until it becomes soft and slightly golden. Then, add the minced garlic and stir for another 30 seconds until fragrant.

4. Cooking the Zucchini and Corn

Add the chopped zucchini to the skillet, followed by salt, black pepper, and Mexican oregano. Stir everything together and allow it to cook for about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. If using fresh corn, add it at this stage. If using canned corn, wait until later to add it so it doesn't become too soft.

5. Adding the Roasted Tomato Sauce

Pour the blended roasted tomato sauce into the pan with the zucchini and corn. Stir everything together and let it simmer for another 7-8 minutes, or until the zucchini is tender but not mushy. If the mixture seems dry, you can add 1/2 cup of water or vegetable broth.

6. Final Adjustments and Garnishing

Taste the **calabacitas** and adjust the seasoning as needed. If using canned corn, stir it in now and let it heat through. Garnish with crumbled Cotija cheese and freshly chopped cilantro before serving.

Variations of Calabacitas

Calabacitas is a versatile dish that you can customize to your taste preferences. Here are some variations to try:



- **Spicy Calabacitas:** Add extra jalapeños or include a diced serrano pepper for an extra kick.
- **Cheesy Calabacitas:** Mix in shredded cheddar or Monterey Jack cheese for a creamier texture.
- **Protein-Packed Calabacitas:** Add cooked black beans or pinto beans for additional protein.
- **Calabacitas with Meat:** Include diced chicken, [ground beef](#), or chorizo for a heartier version.
- **Calabacitas Soup:** Add extra vegetable broth and turn this dish into a comforting soup.

Tips for the Best Calabacitas

To ensure your **calabacitas** turn out flavorful and perfect every time, follow these tips:

- **Use fresh ingredients:** Fresh zucchini, tomatoes, and corn will elevate the taste of the dish.
- **Avoid overcooking the zucchini:** Keep the texture slightly firm to prevent mushiness.
- **Balance the flavors:** Adjust the salt and spices as needed for a well-rounded taste.
- **Experiment with toppings:** Try different cheeses, herbs, or even a squeeze of lime for added freshness.

How to Serve Calabacitas

Calabacitas is a versatile dish that can be served in multiple ways:

- **As a main dish:** Enjoy it as a standalone vegetarian meal.
- **With rice:** Serve it alongside Mexican rice or quinoa for a complete meal.
- **As a taco filling:** Use it as a flavorful filling for tacos, burritos, or enchiladas.
- **With grilled meats:** Pair it with grilled chicken, steak, or shrimp for a delicious combination.

Nutritional Information

Nutrient	Amount per Serving
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Calories	120 kcal
Carbohydrates	22g
Protein	4g
Fat	3g
Fiber	5g
Vitamin A	15% DV
Vitamin C	30% DV
Calcium	8% DV
Iron	6% DV

Final Thoughts

Calabacitas is a delicious, healthy, and easy-to-make dish that brings the flavors of Mexico to your kitchen. With its fresh ingredients and bold flavors, it's a must-try recipe for anyone looking to add variety to their meals. Whether enjoyed as a main dish or a side, **calabacitas** is a dish that will keep you coming back for more. Give it a try and enjoy the authentic taste of Mexican cuisine!

FAQs

Q: Can I make Calabacitas vegan? A: Yes! Simply omit the Cotija cheese or use a vegan cheese alternative.

Q: What other vegetables can I add? A: You can add bell peppers, mushrooms, or carrots for extra flavor and texture.

Q: Can I use canned tomatoes instead of fresh ones? A: Yes, canned tomatoes work well if you don't have fresh ones. Just make sure to drain excess liquid.

Q: How long can I store leftovers? A: Store in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 3 days. Reheat before serving.