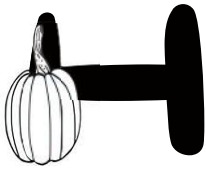




HARD SQUASH MERCHANDISING TO THE NEXT LEVEL



Hard squash often gets buried at the back of the department next to the potatoes and onions, but moving these items to higher-traffic areas in your departments at this time of year will do wonders for your sales. A well-merchandised display of hard squash is truly a thing of beauty. The colors of the different varieties really do lend themselves to building just an absolutely stunning display.

There are numerous styles of merchandising for hard squash. Some stores choose to set up displays with each variety separate, and others utilize the tables and counters to create a beautiful picture of the varieties mixed in with one another, sort of like a farmers market setup. Whichever way you choose, know that your end picture should be a beautiful array of colors, sizes and textures.

Beyond the basics

Acorn, butternut and spaghetti, in most areas, are the three varieties that carry the hard squash category. However, there are many other options that would add a nice array of color and variety and likely entice your customers to try something new. Unlike berries or leafy greens, hard squash is

generally a low-risk item, so it lends itself to bigger displays and opportunities for introducing new varieties. Varieties like kabocha, delicata (my personal favorite) and honeynut have gotten some media exposure over the past couple of years and have gained in popularity with consumers. Carnival, sweet dumpling and red kuri are also finding their ways into more shopping carts. So more squash varieties are being consumed, not just looking pretty on your counters!

Attributes and preparation tips

Each variety has its own shape, size and colors, and looking at a huge display could be confusing to some. Educating your customers on varieties you have in your display and how to prepare them and cook them is key. Try posting a hard squash variety chart on or by your display, or use variety-specific signage with pictures and prices.

Whether you mix and match for a farmers market look or group varieties together within your hard squash display, your final result should be an array of colors, sizes and textures that's attention-grabbing and pleasing to the eye.

Photos: Brian Dey

Once a customer identifies which variety they would like to try, they need to know how to cook it. Printing out and posting recipe ideas gives the customer confidence that they can indeed prepare their squashes once they get them home. There are a ton of hard squash recipe ideas online for every variety you have on display. The possibilities for enjoying the different flavors of fall are endless, so share some of these ideas on your displays! ➔



Top: Hard squash is a great option for festive outdoor or vestibule displays.
Bottom: Make sure to clearly identify the varieties in your display so shoppers know what kind of squash they're getting.

Photos: Brian Dey

Build the basket

All of those recipes require other items, so cross-merchandising adds some convenience and ways to grow the basket size of your display. Brown sugar, maple syrup, olive oil, pasta and pasta sauce, quinoa and a myriad of fresh produce – garlic, onions, peppers, herbs, etc. – are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to cross-merchandising items for a customer to prepare their hard squash dishes with.

Now that's convenient

While a bountiful bulk display of hard squash looks super cool and inviting, there are opportunities to capture some additional sales by having pre-cut squashes available in your value-added section. While there are companies that offer some varieties ready to use, cubing and cutting in-store (as long as you can do so within the proper food safety guidelines) is a great way to grow sales.

Some consumers might look at cutting up hard squashes on their own as too much of a task, and some may actually be unable to do it. Cubed and halved butternut is by far the most popular of these among prepared options, with acorn right behind it.

Make it festive

If you are in an area that is conducive to doing outdoor or vestibule displays, this is a perfect item to lead consumers into your stores. The beautiful colors of squash will create a festive entrance and offer a welcoming display for the customer, not to mention add some impulse sales for your department.

So now it's time for you to get out and build some super cool hard squash displays. Use the tips above to help you create your own successful squash masterpiece! **pmg**

— Brian Dey

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