

>> [Voice over]: Coming from the Narragansett Native American word askutasquash, meaning 'eaten raw or uncooked,' squash was one of the three primary crops for Native Americans known as the "Three Sisters" - which also included beans and corn. While the beans enriched the soil with nitrogen to fertilize the corn and squash, the corn provided a growing structure for the beans. Native to North America, squash was grown to shade out weed plants and retain moisture for the growth of these two other crops. While food lore has it that Christopher Columbus transported squash seeds from the Caribbean to Europe, it has been documented that summer squash has actually been grown in Europe since the Renaissance. Although grouped into summer or winter varieties, we will focus on the summer squash that grows on bush-type plants that thrive in hot Appalachian summers. Harvested when immature and when the rinds are tender and edible, the most common summer squashes are scallop or patty pan, crookneck, and zucchini. Thinner at the stem end than the blossom end, the "crookneck" or "straight neck" squash is pale yellow and matures from blossom to harvest-ready in 4 to 6 days. What better to do with an abundance of squash than to make squash casserole?

Originally referring to the pan in which the dish was cooked, the word casserole is from a French word meaning "sauce-pan": a large, deep dish to cook something in an oven or to serve cooked food in. First appearing in a precursor to what we know today as the macaroni and cheese casserole, the first documented casserole recipe was written in Latin by someone familiar with the Neapolitan court of Charles II of Anjou and found in the "Liber de Cucina". Named "de lasnis," this recipe called for pasta sheets cooked in water, layered with grated cheese, and mild spices. Fast forward to the late 19th century - the New World embraced the idea of the casserole and the dishes brought by immigrants from various countries. During both world wars, casseroles provided both economic and communal sustenance during scarcity of food items in the United States. Then, in the 1950s, the greater availability of canned foods sparked an explosion of casserole dishes that has left a cultural impact still felt today.

One marker of this cultural impact is the bringing of covered dishes, including casseroles, to the bereaved in small towns. If a death occurs in the summer, squash casserole is a favorite that makes an appearance at almost every funeral dinner. Squash casserole is an ideal dish because it meets the unwritten rules of funeral food: it is able to be transported with ease, able to be reheated, and is savory

and comforting to the broken-hearted. Although an old custom, this phenomenon puts squash casserole in a cultural context and allows us to see how funeral cuisine is an old custom that joins together both community and food.

Squash casserole is also involved in an interesting conversation concerning the representation of authentic black life as it pertains to televisual spaces. My Momma Throws Down was a cooking competition show that aired on TV One beginning in May 2012 and was cancelled after its first season. Following a similar format of Iron Chef and Iron Chef America, My Momma Throws Down featured mostly married, heterosexual, black women with large families and put them head-to-head in culinary face offs. In the first episode of the series, two mothers are challenged to cook a predetermined dish - squash casserole. Here is a clip showcasing the interstices of race, class, and gender in My Momma Throws Down, as well as how televisual spaces shape narratives of authentic identity of black life and "soul food".

>> [Television clip]: "... is My Momma Throws Down. It's time to reveal whats on the menu for our throw-down, show-down. Ladies, are you ready? Ready. Alright. Todays show-down dish is Squash casserole and green salad [applause]. Yes it is. Healthy, healthy, healthy. Squash casserole is something that I prepare for my family like on special occasions, maybe Thanksgiving. It's not something that we eat all the time but I'm glad that I knew how to do it."

>> [Voice over]: Squash casserole takes on a variety of representations in cookbooks and literature, but let's first focus on its representation outside of what the Appalachian Regional Commission considers Appalachia. The book, Eat Drink Delta: A Hungry Traveler's Journey through the Soul of the South by Susan Puckett establishes a brief history of the Greenwood region of the Mississippi Delta and reviews restaurants and recipes from the area. Accustomed to having prolific gardens, Delta families are known to have written community cookbooks - including one titled Itta Bena's Favorite Recipes published by the Woman's Club of Itta Bena (a tiny farm town about fifteen minutes from Greenwood) in 1950. This book includes a recipe for Mrs. Innes McIntrye's Squash Soufflé that includes yellow summer squash, onions, butter, all-purpose flour, sugar, salt, pepper, eggs, and grated full-flavored cheese. When looking at recipes such as these, it is interesting to see how squash casserole changes in recipes both inside and outside of Appalachia. The word "soufflé" as opposed to casserole is also interesting - giving the reader of the recipe a connotation that this recipe is fluffier and lighter than a

casserole would be. Could this be a cultural characteristic of food that is valued outside of Appalachia?

Within Appalachia, on the other hand, squash casserole takes on a different form. As seen in Dorothy Derrick's recipe for "Southern Squash Casserole" published in 2005 by Dogwood Crafters, an arts and crafts gallery that has been in operation since 1976 in the tourist town of Dillsboro, North Carolina, this recipe follows the more traditional or conventional presumption of what a squash casserole should consist of. Utilizing yellow squash, onion, butter, eggs, cream of mushroom soup, salt, and buttered bread crumbs, this recipe includes ingredients like cream of mushroom soup that are more likely to be found in Southern variations of this recipe.

Another interesting take on the traditional squash casserole can be found in Ronni Lundy's 1999 cookbook, *Butter Beans to Blackberries: Recipes from the Southern Garden*. Using only fresh yellow summer squash, bacon, kosher salt, sugar, and white onion, Lundy adapts a recipe that she had at the Lone Oak Restaurant outside of Scottsdale, Kentucky and adds a "Texarkana" twist. Because Lundy is a distinguished food writer and cookbook author whose work is notable in the realm of foodways, this unique variation of the squash casserole provides credible insight into Appalachian food, history, and culture.

While there are many other variations of squash casserole, including Alice Ward Griffin's recipe published in *Mountain Elegance: A Collection of Favorite Recipes* by Bright Mountain in Asheville, North Carolina in 1991 and Paula Smalling's recipe published in *From Our Mountain Kitchens* by Green Valley Elementary School & Meat Camp Volunteer Fire Department in Boone, North Carolina in 1984, the importance of this recipe remains the same.

In this video, we have examined squash casserole through both a historical and cultural lens. We have also looked at its representation across cookbooks and literature both inside and outside of Appalachia to see how the recipe differs based on the ingredients used by the preparer and the language associated with the dish itself - for example, "casserole" versus "soufflé." Overall, this video serves as a synthesis of information about squash casserole to add to an already thriving global community of foodways knowledge and scholarship. To find more information about diverse food in the American South, visit the Southern Foodways Alliance at www.southernfoodways.org.

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