

GROUND TURKEY BUTTERNUT SQUASH SKILLET

adapted from theeroastedroot.net

2 Tbsp avocado oil	1 tsp ground paprika
3 c butternut squash, peeled, chopped	3-4 Tbsp soy sauce or coconut aminos
1/2 red onion, sliced	sea salt to taste
1 1.5-in piece ginger, peeled, grated	2 large rainbow chard leaves, chopped
1 lb ground turkey	

1. Heat avocado oil in large cast iron skillet over medium heat. Add butternut squash and red onion. Cover and cook 2-3 minutes until beginning to soften.
2. Move squash and onion to one side of the skillet and place raw ground turkey on the skillet, all in one piece. Sprinkle with paprika and add grated ginger. Cook 2-3 minutes until turkey is seared. Flip turkey and sear on the other side another 2 minutes. Use spatula to break up turkey meat and stir into the rest of the skillet.
3. Add soy sauce and chard. Stir well and cover. Cook until ground turkey is cooked through and vegetables reach desired softness, about 4-5 minutes.
4. Remove cover and continue cooking until much of the liquid has burned off. Add more coconut aminos and/or sea salt to taste.

SPANISH POTATO SOUP WITH CHORIZO

Adapted from servingdumplings.com

1 Tbsp olive oil	1 tsp salt
1 lb organic chorizo sausage, sliced	1 tsp black pepper
1 green bell pepper, chopped	1/4 tsp cayenne pepper
1 yellow onion, finely chopped	2 Tbsp tomato paste
4 garlic cloves, minced	2 Tbsp flour
1 carrot, peeled, chopped	1.5-2 lbs red gold potatoes
1 tsp dried oregano	6 c chicken broth
1 tsp ground cumin	3/4 c heavy cream
1 tsp sweet paprika	2 Tbsp chopped parsley

1. Heat oil over medium high in a large pot. Add chorizo and cook 3 minutes until starting to brown. Add bell pepper, cook for 2 minutes. Add onion and garlic, cook for 2 minutes more. Stir in carrots, salt, black pepper, cumin, oregano, paprika and cayenne. Cook another 2 minutes.
2. Add tomato paste, stir until combined. Add flour, stir until incorporated. Add potatoes and pour in broth. Bring to boil, cover, reduce heat to medium low and simmer for 15 minutes or until the potatoes are tender.
3. When ready, add cream and parsley. Cook 3 minutes. Serve with crusty bread.



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Leafy Greens: Store leafy greens in the fridge in a perforated plastic bag. If you chop and wash ahead of time, spin the leaves dry before putting back in the bag with a dry paper towel to absorb moisture. Refresh as needed by plunging them in ice water 15-20 minutes.

Fall Squash: Store all fall squash in a cool, dry, dark place at around 50-70 degrees. They get sweeter in storage as the starch converts to sugar. Once cut, wrap in plastic and refrigerate for up to a week.

Apples: Store apples in a bag in your refrigerator. Keep in mind that apples are prone to absorb the odors of the produce around them, so don't place them close to onions or potatoes.

Sweet Potato: Store at room temperature. Refrigeration will cause them to harden and blacken when cooked. Check weekly and use any that may soften, most will keep for weeks or months.

Tomatoes: Store at room temperature for best results. Slicing tomatoes should have the stem side down on the counter. Salad and cherry size tomatoes can be laid out in a single layer to allow you to enjoy the ripest ones first.

Chance Encounters

No matter what your mama may have told you to help you sleep at night, there are things out there in the dark. The farm is an ideal habitat for furry mammals of all kinds to rear their young, and they have done so for thousands of years. As our farming ancestors altered the landscape over the last 200 or so years, wild animals have adapted their natural instincts in order to coexist with us and our domesticated animals. We know they are out there! We see evidence they leave behind, and have chance encounters with them from time to time.

A few years back, a wildlife biologist from UK put out several trail cameras in strategic locations around the farm to see what creatures are lurking at night. We captured some cows licking all over the cameras. But besides that, the cameras confirmed what we suspected: deer, opossums, skunks, mice, voles, raccoons, rabbits, squirrels, groundhogs, weasels, coyotes, and foxes all live or hunt out here on the banks of the Elkhorn with us. Fencerows make for safe travel zones as they search for food and water. Fallen trees, rock outcrops, rows of hay bales, wood piles, and little-used tobacco barns provide refuge. Poultry are easy prey, and produce easily rounds out their dietary needs—we have something for everyone.

When we find arrowheads in the fields, it's fascinating to think that the last time it was touched by a human was hundreds, if not thousands of years ago. Indigenous people crafted sharp stones, affixing them to straight wooden sticks with feathers for guidance, and a notch on the back end for a thin piece of leather to propel it forward, having been stretched tight by a bowed branch. Some of those arrowheads must have been aimed at the ancestors of the animals we see today.

Early settlers cleared trees to till the soil and grow grass for livestock; obviously this changed the habitat forever. Therefore all the critters have now figured out how to coexist with us and our manipulation of the landscape. Generally speaking, the cohabitation goes without much fanfare. Promoting biodiversity is a tenet of organic agriculture, so we try to keep wildlife out of harm's way and let them fill their niche in our ecosystem. For example, the electric netting prevents them from preying on the poultry, which keeps us from having to prey on them.

From the first intrusion of Europeans into this area, these wild mammals were hunted for their pelts. Coyote hides and small animal skins are used to make trim pieces on clothing like cuffs and collars. It is much easier to work with than thick cow hides. Until a few years ago, there was still a thriving market for these pelts. But with supply chains and demand trends transforming over the years, prices for pelts have plummeted. Our trapper friend, Scott, has no incentive to trap our raccoons and coyotes, so their numbers are creeping up.

We hear the coyotes more than we see them. Distant eerie howling makes the hair stand up on the back of your neck, but “eerie” is not the word for their blood-curdling screams in the pre-dawn hours as they move in packs. It can be totally quiet, when suddenly countless coyotes begin to yelp and holler. We do see them in the daytime occasionally, but (knock on wood) no animals have been taken by any for many years. Instead, the coyotes have developed a taste for sweetcorn, so now we have to use the tall electric netting to keep them out of the corn. But they still keep the mice, vole, and rabbit populations down, and for that we say thanks.

Encounters with skunks are legendary character-building experiences. Like the time I came up on a skunk in a chicken field pen, munching on a broiler chick. I knew if I ran to get my .22 rifle, it would run off. So I was left to use the only resource available: the empty five gallon feed bucket in my hand. Having watched dogs tangle with skunks before, I knew the turning of the tail was not just to run away and anticipated the spray of stench that was coming my way. After some fancy footwork from both of us, I rendered it incapacitated, but the dog still didn't want anything to do with it. I've not been got, yet, but when one wanders into the fields patrolled by the Great Pyrenees, we all suffer. We have tried tomato juice, lemon juice and the commercially available skunk-off products to rid the dogs of the stench; they all seem to just transfer the odor to us. That stuff does not wash off.

In times of really dry weather, small mammals have learned how to get water from leaks in our irrigation pipes and hoses. We know this not only from their tracks, but also from the holes chewed through the plastic to get more water to come out. Nowadays, they don't even look for a leak; they just make a hole wherever they want to. Buzz, the first Pyrenees we had, once laid in a spot in the field for days. We thought he might be sick or hurt. But no, he was waiting for the groundhogs under the “stuff barn” to make their way to water, where he summarily relieved them of their thirst. I hear raccoons can roam many miles every night to access food and water so we must always be vigilant like Buzz to not give them any more reason to visit us. For the record, raccoons are not cute. They are dastardly devils who can devour chickens and wreak havoc on stored grains.

As farmers, we impose our will on the land we steward. As organic farmers, we have chosen to not put toxins into our ecosystem which would harm the animals who cohabitate with us. We judiciously employ psychological or physical barriers when wildlife would otherwise wipe out our crops. And since we have trained our critters to eat within their natural tendencies, we get to enjoy watching a coyote pup pounce on a vole hiding under the snow. We get to see baby groundhogs become big fat ones in a matter of weeks. We get to watch the squirrels stash away nuts for themselves. But we know to avoid encounters with the skunks, unless they need to be taught who rules the roost. -Mac