Acorn squash baked with apples and cider
Serves 4

4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
2 small (1 pound each) acorn or carnival squash
Salt and pepper, to taste
2 Granny Smith apples, peeled and cut into 3/4-inch dice
1 1/2 cups cider
2 tablespoons maple syrup
1/2 teaspoon nutmeg

1. Set the oven at 375 degrees. Have on hand a large, shallow baking dish.

2. With a pastry brush, coat the bottom of the baking dish with some of the melted butter.

3. Cut a thin slice off both ends of each squash. Cut squash in half crosswise. Scoop out the seeds. Place halves in the baking dish with the cavity sides up, and brush with melted butter. Sprinkle with salt and pepper.

4. In a bowl, combine the apples, 1/4 cup of the cider, the maple syrup, 1/8 teaspoon of the nutmeg and a pinch of salt. Divide the apples among the cavities of the 4 squash halves, distributing the excess liquid among them evenly. Drizzle with the remaining melted butter and sprinkle with the remaining nutmeg. Pour the remaining cider into the baking dish. Cover loosely with foil and bake for 45 minutes to 1 & 1/4 hours, until almost tender when pierced with a fork.

5. Remove the foil and continue to bake for 15 minutes, or until squash is tender. If apples brown before the squash is cooked, cover the tops with small squares of foil. Drizzle the cider from the baking dish over the squash just before serving.

Leftovers: Make a squash and apple soup. Scoop out the flesh and puree it with the apples in a blender. Add stock or water, salt, pepper and grated fresh ginger to taste. Drizzle with leftover heavy cream if you like.

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