

Convenient cans contain organic butternut squash

Farmer's Market Organic Butternut Squash: \$2.29 per 15-ounce can.

Bonnie: What can I say about a can of 100 percent certified organic butternut squash, other than "Great!" It contains nothing but puréed butternut squash. No seasoning. No preservatives. Nothing but this fiber- and beta-carotene-rich veggie.

It's great to make into soup or to heat, season and serve as a simple side dish. Way to go, Farmer's Market.

Carolyn: Convenient frozen squash has been available in both mashed and cube form for years. I know, because my butternut squash-loving dad and I used to use these products on Thanksgivings when we were not feeling up to the demands of paring, coring, cubing and cooking fresh butternut squash.

But canned butternut squash was fairly rare, and organic canned butternut squash was nonexistent before Farmer's Market came along.

I don't care about this being organic as much as that it contains no salt or spices. So it's easy to use in any recipe or seasoned the way you like as a Thanksgiving side dish with less texture, but also lots less work, than do-it-yourself butternut squash.

Boursin Apple, Cranberry & Cinnamon Cheese: \$5.99 to \$6.99 per 5.2-ounce box.

Bonnie: Boursin – the soft, mild cream cheese-like cheese usually flavored with fine herbs – is now available with fall ingredients: apples, cranberries and cinnamon. A 1-ounce serving contains 130 calories and 12 grams of total fat (with 8 grams of saturated fat).

With this nutritional information in mind, I recommend spreading a small amount on a baguette for a ham, turkey or roast beef sandwich, or using it on a cheese platter surrounded by fresh fruit. If you want to try it, do so soon, as it's available only through the end of the holiday season.

Carolyn: High on the wish list of anyone who does holiday entertaining are foods that are both easy and elegant. Boursin's gift to those folks this year is a new apple-cranberry-cinnamon version of its French Gournay cheese.

I think of Gournay as a slightly cheesier and higher-class version of American cream cheese.

Classic Boursin is flavored with garlic and herbs, and is usually served as an appetizer with crackers or bread. This new sweet one (or Boursin's already existing Fig, Raisin & Nut variety) would work equally well on your holiday dessert buffet.

Betty Crocker Flavored Mashed Potatoes: Sweet Potato; Yukon Gold; \$1.89 per 4.8-ounce to 6.3-ounce box containing two pouches each yielding three servings.

Bonnie: Even kitchen-challenged people like Carolyn use fresh ingredients to make holiday meals. But I can't even recommend these new Betty Crocker Yukon Gold and Sweet Potato mashed mixes for everyday use.

Sure they're simple to make, but what about taste and nutrition? As for taste, they're sorely lacking. These boxed sweet potatoes also contain little to none of the potassium, fiber, and vitamins A, C and B6 for which real sweet potatoes are justly famed. Real sweet potatoes also contain iron and calcium. Fresh Yukon gold aren't as nutritious, but they are still much better than this boxed version.

Either is so easy to prepare from scratch. For Thanksgiving, just toss some Yukon gold and/or sweet potatoes into the oven on the rack beside your turkey about an hour before the turkey is supposed to be done. Then simply enjoy them roasted or mashed with some milk and butter.

Carolyn: In much of the country, sweet potatoes once were a Thanksgiving-only food. But recent glowing nutritional reports as well as their inclusion on the South

Beach Diet have changed all that. Similarly, Yukon gold potatoes have recently become popular for their buttery color and taste. Hence these new Betty Crocker instant mashed versions of both.

It's too bad that the taste can't overcome the telltale cardboard flavor of instant mashed potatoes. The more assertively flavored sweet potato does better in instant form, but these Betty Crocker's mashed sweet potatoes are still not as distinctive-tasting as the real thing. That could be because, like Betty Crocker's Yukon Gold, this is a blend of the named potato with ordinary white russets. That makes this sweet potato mix not only easier to make than from-scratch mashed, but also easier to take for those still getting used to the strong taste of sweet potatoes.

But I agree with Bonnie that baking potatoes (I do mine in the microwave) and mashing them with a fork is easy – if not quite as creamy as proper mashed or the potatoes produced by these boxes.

Bonnie Tandy Leblang is a registered dietitian and creator of "Express Lane Cooking: A Simple Solution to What's for Dinner." Carolyn Wyman is a junk food fanatic and author of "The Kitchen Sink Cookbook."