

## Kabak tatlısı (aka candied butternut squash)

Here's an unusual alternative for using up a butternut squash or two. Or you could use pumpkin. We first enjoyed kabak tatlısı in Istanbul as a dainty dessert at Musa Dağdeviren's wonderful [Çiya](#) restaurant. After that we spotted it around Turkey in various places and had the good fortune to learn how to make it from both Zeliha İrez, at her lovely [guesthouse](#), and Engin Akin, a food writer and [cooking teacher](#). This recipe follows their tried-and-tested method. You will need to do some maths; the candying stage follows a ratio of 2:3:4 of squash:sugar:water. I use a large copper preserving pan, but any really big, wide saucepan will do. It's really good and I dare you to try it!



The use of calcium hydroxide, also known as 'pickling lime', 'hydrated lime' and 'slaked lime', is optional. It will work just fine without it; simply miss out step 2. But if you can find it, do use it, as its effect is remarkable. Somehow (and I'd really like to know how) it causes the pieces of squash to develop a firm, almost crunchy skin, so that when you bite into a piece you will experience the marvelous texture combination of the crystalline exterior and soft gooey insides. Plus, it helps the squash keep its shape while cooking for so

long. Calcium hydroxide is used for similar purposes in Indian cookery, so you can find it in good Indian food shops. It comes as a white paste. I got mine from [www.spicesofindia.co.uk](http://www.spicesofindia.co.uk). Their little green tubs of 'chuna edible lime' hold approximately 4 tablespoons each and cost just 75p. (I'm trying to ignore the fact they're labelled 'for external use only'.)

Kabak tatlısı belongs to a fascinating family of sweet preserves, including rose petal, aubergine, fig, tomato and green walnut, which we found in Romania, the Balkans, Greece and Turkey. During our travels in these countries we became slightly obsessed with these beautiful 'spoon sweets' and spent a good deal of time trying to uncover their origins. You can read about what we found out here:

<http://www.culinaryanthropologist.org/2008/05/to-romania-in-a-spoon.html>

**Serves: lots of people lots of times**

**Total busy time: 30 mins**

**Total lazy time: 5+ hours**

butternut squash

calcium hydroxide paste



granulated white sugar  
water  
lemon juice  
cloves and/or bay leaves

1. Peel squash, halve lengthways and scoop out seeds. Cut into 1½" chunks & weigh.

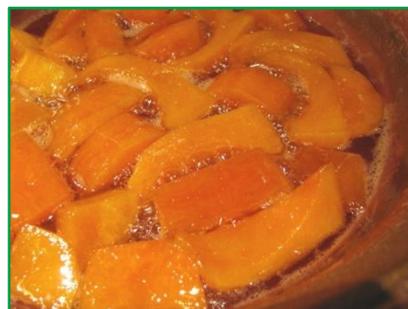
2. In a large bowl mix water twice the weight of your squash with some pickling lime. So, if your prepared squash weighs 1kg you'll need 2 litres of water. Use approximately 2 tablespoons of lime per 250g of squash that you have. Mix to dissolve the lime as best you can. Add squash and leave to soak for around 3-4 hours, stirring occasionally as all the lime will sink to the bottom. Drain squash and rinse it really well, several times. Leave to drain.



3. Put sugar weighing 1½ times the weight of your squash into a very large, wide, saucepan. Add water weighing twice as much as your squash. So for example, if you have 1kg of squash, you'll be using 1½kg sugar and 2 litres of water. Very gently heat the water and sugar until sugar is dissolved. Do not let it boil and resist stirring. Then crank up the heat and boil syrup for around 20-30 minutes or until it has thickened ever so slightly to the consistency of thin oil. Do not stir.

4. Meanwhile bring a large saucepan of water to the boil, add the squash and blanch for 2 minutes in the boiling water. Drain, refresh in cold water and drain again.

5. When syrup and squash are both ready, add squash to syrup and simmer for 1½ to 2 hours, or until the squash looks candied. Skim any scum that rises to the surface. You'll see that the sugar penetrates the squash's cells, turning them translucent. Resist stirring. After an hour of cooking, add juice of one big lemon per 1kg of squash.



6. **NB:** While squash is candying you may notice that sugar crystals form on the side of the saucepan. This is not good, as it may result in the syrup crystallising later, when it is nicer if it stays clear and liquid. Remove the forming crystals by washing them down with a wet pastry brush or wad of kitchen paper.

7. **NB:** When squash is done you want the syrup to be nicely thickened, but not so cooked that when it cools it will solidify into candy. If you are used to working with sugar you will be able to tell what stage it has reached by dribbling it off a spoon. If you are not, test it by putting a little syrup onto a chilled saucer or into some cold water and then seeing what consistency it ends up once cooled. If you think your syrup is going to end up too thick once cooled, add some water to the pot and let it simmer together a little longer, until the desired syrupiness is achieved.

8. Let squash cool in syrup overnight. Then carefully decant it into sterilised jars, top up with syrup and seal. If you want, you can include several cloves and/or bay leaves in the jar(s) for added flavour. It should keep for ages. Serve as a little treat at the end of the meal, on its own or with some clotted cream, ice cream or tahini and a garnish of chopped nuts, such as walnuts, hazelnuts or pistachios.