

Roasted Butternut Squash and Pearl Barley Salad with Balsamic Dressing

A nutrient-dense, fiber-rich salad featuring low-GI pearl barley and roasted squash—perfect for steady blood sugar levels and sustained energy throughout the day.

Prep: 15 min

Cook: 30 min

Total: 45 min

Servings: 8

GL 12.8 / GI 27

Ingredients

Medium GI (51); rich in fiber and beta-carotene butternut squash, peeled and cut into long pieces

Healthy fat that slows glucose absorption olive oil for roasting

Exceptionally low GI (28); high in soluble fiber pearl barley

Very low GI; contains chromium for insulin support Tenderstem broccoli, cut into medium pieces

Concentrated flavor without added sugars sun-dried tomatoes, sliced

Low GI; contains quercetin small red onion, diced

Protein and healthy fats; supports stable blood sugar pumpkin seeds

Adds flavor without impacting blood sugar small capers, rinsed

Healthy fats; negligible glycemic impact black olives, pitted

Anti-inflammatory properties fresh basil, chopped

Acetic acid helps moderate blood sugar response balsamic vinegar

Monounsaturated fats slow carbohydrate absorption extra-virgin olive oil

Minimal glycemic impact; adds depth Dijon mustard

May improve insulin sensitivity garlic clove, finely chopped

Instructions

Step 1

Preheat your oven to 200°C (400°F/Gas Mark 6). Arrange the butternut squash cubes on a large baking tray, drizzle with 2 tablespoons olive oil, and toss to coat evenly. Season lightly with salt and pepper, then roast for 25-30 minutes until tender and lightly caramelized at the edges, turning once halfway through. The light oil coating helps moderate the glycemic response.

Step 2

While the squash roasts, bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the pearl barley and cook for approximately 25-30 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the grains are tender but still have a pleasant chew (al dente texture). The barley should be soft enough to eat comfortably but not mushy. Boiling is the preferred cooking method to maintain the lowest possible GI.

Step 3

Prepare the balsamic vinaigrette by whisking together 3 tablespoons balsamic vinegar, 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard, and the finely minced garlic clove in a small bowl. Season generously with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Whisk vigorously until the dressing is well emulsified and slightly thickened. The healthy fats in this dressing help slow glucose absorption.

Step 4

When the barley is cooked, drain it thoroughly in a fine-mesh sieve and transfer to a large mixing bowl. Immediately pour the balsamic vinaigrette over the hot barley and stir well to ensure every grain is coated. Allow the dressed barley to cool to room temperature, stirring occasionally—this helps the grains absorb the flavorful dressing and allows resistant starch to form, further lowering the glycemic impact.

Step 5

Bring a medium pot of salted water to a boil and add the Tenderstem broccoli pieces. Cook for 3-4 minutes until just tender and bright green—you want them to retain some crunch. Drain immediately and rinse under cold running water to stop the cooking process and preserve the vibrant color. Pat the broccoli dry with a clean kitchen towel.

Step 6

Remove the roasted butternut squash from the oven and let it cool slightly. Once the barley has reached room temperature, add the roasted squash, blanched broccoli, sliced sun-dried tomatoes, diced red onion, pumpkin seeds, rinsed capers, and pitted black olives to the bowl.

Step 7

Add the freshly chopped basil to the salad and gently fold all ingredients together until evenly distributed, being careful not to break up the squash pieces too much. Taste and adjust seasoning with additional salt, pepper, or a splash more balsamic vinegar if desired. Serve at room temperature or chilled. This salad stores beautifully in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3 days. For optimal blood sugar control, consider eating the vegetables first before the barley and squash.