

Preparation Time: 20 minutes

Cooking Time: 55–60 minutes

Total Time: Approximately 1 hour 15 minutes to 1 hour 20 minutes

Serves: 6–8

Table of Contents



- [Ingredients](#)
 - [For the Bake](#)
 - [For the Topping](#)
 - [For the Hot Honey](#)
- [Method](#)
 - [Step 1: Roast the Squash \(Intensity: Moderate\)](#)
 - [Step 2: Cook the Pasta \(Intensity: Low\)](#)
 - [Step 3: Build the Sauce and Filling \(Intensity: Moderate\)](#)
 - [Step 4: Add Burrata and Bake \(Intensity: Low\)](#)
 - [Step 5: Toast the Pecans and Make the Hot Honey \(Intensity: Low\)](#)
 - [Step 6: Finish and Serve \(Intensity: Low\)](#)
- [Notes and Variations](#)
- [Nutrition \(Estimated, per serving, based on 8 servings\)](#)

Ingredients

For the Bake

- 1 large butternut squash (about 2.5–3 lbs), peeled, seeded, and cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1 lb penne pasta

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 medium shallot, finely chopped
- ½ teaspoon smoked paprika
- ½ teaspoon dried sage (or 1 teaspoon fresh, finely chopped)
- Pinch of red pepper flakes (optional, for background heat)
- 1 cup whole milk or half-and-half
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 5 oz baby spinach (about 5 large handfuls)
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

For the Topping

- 2 balls fresh burrata (about 8 oz total)

- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup pecan halves, roughly chopped
- 1 tablespoon olive oil (for toasting pecans)

For the Hot Honey

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup honey
 - 1-2 teaspoons crushed red pepper flakes (adjust to your heat preference)
 - 1 teaspoon apple cider vinegar
 - Pinch of salt
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Method

Step 1: Roast the Squash (Intensity: Moderate)

Preheat your oven to 425°F (220°C). Line a large rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. In a large bowl, toss the cubed butternut squash with 3 tablespoons olive oil, smoked paprika, dried sage, a generous pinch of salt, and black pepper. Spread the squash in a single layer on the prepared baking sheet. Roast for 25-30 minutes, flipping once halfway through, until the squash is fork-tender and the edges are lightly caramelized and golden. Remove from the oven and reduce the oven temperature to 375°F (190°C) for the bake.

Step 2: Cook the Pasta (Intensity: Low)

While the squash roasts, bring a large pot of generously salted water to a boil. Cook the penne according to package directions until just shy of al dente (it will finish cooking in the oven). Reserve about 1 cup of pasta water, then drain the penne and set aside.

Step 3: Build the Sauce and Filling (Intensity: Moderate)

In a large Dutch oven or deep skillet, heat a drizzle of olive oil over medium heat. Add the shallot and cook for 3–4 minutes until softened and translucent. Add the garlic and cook for 30 seconds more, just until fragrant—do not let it brown. Add the roasted squash to the pot and mash it gently with the back of a wooden spoon until it breaks down into a chunky, rustic sauce. Pour in the milk or half-and-half and stir to combine. Add the Parmesan and stir until melted and smooth. If the mixture seems thick, add a splash of the reserved pasta water. Taste and adjust salt and pepper. Fold in the baby spinach in handfuls, stirring until it wilts into the sauce, about 2 minutes. Add the drained penne and toss everything together until the pasta is evenly coated. Transfer the mixture to a 9×13-inch baking dish (or keep it in the Dutch oven if it is oven-safe).

Step 4: Add Burrata and Bake (Intensity: Low)

Tear the burrata balls into rough chunks and nestle them evenly across the top of the pasta. Do not stir them in—they should sit on the surface and melt into creamy pools as the bake finishes. Transfer the dish to the 375°F oven and bake for 15–20 minutes, until the burrata is softened, the edges are bubbling, and the pasta is heated through. If you want a bit more color on the cheese, switch on the broiler for the final 1–2 minutes, watching closely to prevent burning.

Step 5: Toast the Pecans and Make the Hot Honey (Intensity: Low)

While the bake is in the oven, toast the pecans. Heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in a small skillet over medium-low heat. Add the chopped pecans and toast for 3–4 minutes, stirring

frequently, until fragrant and lightly golden. Transfer to a plate to cool. For the hot honey, combine the honey and red pepper flakes in a small saucepan over low heat. Warm gently for 3–4 minutes—do not let it boil—then remove from heat and stir in the apple cider vinegar and a pinch of salt . Let it steep while the bake finishes. You can strain out the flakes for a smooth drizzle or leave them in for extra texture and heat.

Step 6: Finish and Serve (Intensity: Low)

Remove the bake from the oven and let it rest for 5 minutes. Scatter the toasted pecans over the top. Drizzle generously with the warm hot honey—start with a few tablespoons and pass extra at the table. Finish with a light sprinkle of flaky salt if you have it. Serve immediately, scooping deep so each portion gets pasta, sauce, and a piece of the creamy burrata.

Notes and Variations

- **Make-ahead:** The squash can be roasted and the hot honey made up to 3 days in advance. Store separately in the refrigerator and reheat gently before assembling.
- **Nut-free option:** Omit the pecans or substitute toasted pepitas (pumpkin seeds) for a similar crunch.
- **Extra protein:** Add a can of drained and rinsed chickpeas to the pasta mixture before baking, or crumble in some cooked Italian sausage.
- **Cheese swap:** If burrata is unavailable, torn fresh mozzarella or dollops of whole-milk ricotta work well, though burrata’s creamy center is what makes this dish special.

Nutrition (Estimated, per serving, based on 8 servings)

Note: These figures are estimates and will vary based on exact ingredient brands and portion sizes.

- Calories: Approximately 480-520 kcal
- Total Fat: 18-22 g
- Saturated Fat: 7-9 g
- Carbohydrates: 65-70 g
- Fiber: 5-6 g
- Sugar: 14-16 g (including honey)
- Protein: 15-17 g
- Sodium: 280-350 mg