



# Growing Squash

Number 0017

March 12, 2010



## Squash Prefer it Warm

Squash prefer a warm sheltered site in full sun. Mix plenty of compost or rotted manure into soil since squash prefer a rich loamy soil with good fertility and drainage. Squash need an even and sufficient soil moisture, at least 1 inch of water per week. Water around the base of the plants, early in the day. Squash benefit from mild feedings with a fertilizer high in phosphorous to initiate fruit formation.

## When to Plant

Sow seed outdoors after all danger of frost has passed and soil is warm (June 1 -7). The soil can be prewarmed by covering the area with black plastic. Squash seed will not germinate in cool soil. For an early crop, sow seeds indoors 3-4 weeks before the last frost date (May 1) for transplanting into the garden the first week of June.

## Sowing Seed

In the garden sow seed of large vine types in rows 9-10 feet apart, plants 4 feet apart, 4 – 5 seeds per hill or group at a depth of  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 inch. For bush or semi-bush types have rows 6 feet apart, plants 4 feet apart. Thin to 2 strongest seedlings per group. Bush types are the only varieties to grow in containers.

Indoors sow 2 seeds  $\frac{1}{2}$  - 1 inch deep per pot using 3-4 inch peat or plastic pots at a germination temperature of 21 ° C. Thin to one seedling per pot leaving the largest one. These transplants must be hardened off before planting them into the garden. They will also have to be watered often until they are well rooted into the garden soil.

## Varieties to Plant

There are two basic types of squash: Summer and Winter. Summer squash are thin skinned and are eaten raw or cooked when the fruit is immature. Most summer squash are bush types. Good varieties of zucchini are 'Gold Rush' or 'Green Select' and scallop types are 'Sunny Delight' or 'Starship'. Two to four plants will likely supply enough for a family.

Winter squash come in a variety of sizes, shapes, colours and textures. Some form bushy plant but many are trailing and will spread widely over the ground and some are semi-bush. Winter squash have hard skins and deep orange flesh. For the average gardener, the smaller bush types are the best and choose early varieties in the 75 – 95 day range. Good varieties to try are: Acorn or pepper type 'Cream of the Crop', 'Table Ace', 'Honey Bear', 'Celebration' or 'Heart of Gold'. Buttercup varieties are 'Bonbon' or 'Orange Cutie'. Kabocha type is 'Sweet Mama'. Butternut type is 'Early Butternut Hybrid'. All are available from Stokes except Celebration and Heart of Gold which are available from Veseys.

## Harvesting

Summer squash should be harvested 4-6 inches long for zucchini types and 3 inches in diameter for scallop types. Regular harvesting all summer encourages plants to go on producing new fruits.

Winter squash you plan to store are best left to grow as long as possible until all the vines die or are hit by the first light frost. The shell should be quite hard, not easily dented by a thumbnail. Harvest on a sunny dry day by cutting off the vines leaving a 2-3 inch stem on each squash. Roll squash over and leave to dry for a few hours. Be careful not to bruise the squash and do not carry them by their handles (stems). If the stem breaks off, use within 3-4 weeks because they will not store well.

## Storing

Winter squash must be mature in order to store well. Cure them for 1-2 weeks to dry and harden their shells in a well ventilated warm place. If too cool outside, put them near the furnace, wood stove or sunny porch. Exposure to frost injures their keeping quality. Store in a dark cool 10-12 ° C area with good ventilation on a shelf is good. Do not put them on a cement floor since the concrete causes the squash to sweat promoting rot. Winter squash should store 2-6 months depending on maturity and variety.

## Problems you Might Encounter

Squash beetles also known as cucumber beetles. Only solution available now are spraying with insecticidal soap or using floating row covers. They are too fast to catch with your fingers. Squash vine borer is a fat white caterpillar that tunnels into the squash stem causing the vine to wilt and die. Powdery mildew can be prevented by using sulphur or copper fungicides during humid damp weather or choose disease resist varieties. Most years, powdery mildew does not become a problem until late in the season when the early maturing varieties are pretty well mature anyway.

Learn more about squash on [Wikipedia >](#)