

Cleveland Seed Bank's

guide to growing

SQUASH

Squash was cultivated over 10,000 years ago as a food and tool source. Native Cucurbita is found around Mesoamerica through Argentina; what we now call Southern Mexico has the highest diversity of native squash species in the world. 'Squash' comes from the Narragansett term 'askutasquash', which roughly translates to "a green thing eaten raw."

Evidence suggests that a native pollinator, the bee *P. pruinosa*, followed the squash's distribution into the more temperate regions of North America; the first known case of a pollinator's range expanding with the spread of a domesticated plant!

Latin name: *Cucurbita pepo*, *C. maxima* & *C. moschata*

Sun: Full

Life cycle: Annual

Direct sow or transplant: Transplant

Height: 2-6'+ depending on variety

Container Friendly: Not recommended



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SOW



Direct sow/transplant: Direct sow is recommended. In the Northeast, winter squash is usually grown indoors and then transplanted due to its long growing season.

Common mistakes: Starting seeds too early can cause rot. Thin early to prevent over crowding.

Days to germination: ~ 7-10 days, depending on temperature and weather.

When: Direct sow summer squash when there is no danger of frost, in NE OH this is around the end of April. Transplant summer squash plants 1 week after final frost.

Seedling Depth: 1-1/2 inch deep (ideally twice the seed's length).

Spacing: Sow bush varieties 1-2 feet apart & vining varieties 2-3 feet apart. Consider squash fruit size when spacing.

Succession sowing: Summer squash can be succession sown every 3 weeks until 3 months before first fall frost.

Companion planting: Marigold, nasturtium, and herbs like dill make great companion choices for squash.

GROW

Soil: Squash needs loose, well-draining soil with a pH between 5.8-6.8. Squash are "heavy feeders" so make sure to add compost often.

Trellising Vining squash needs strong trellising & bush types could also use help supporting their heavy fruits. A 'hog fence' trellis can be used. For vining types, bend the hog trellis to create arches throughout your garden. Some gardeners use netting to cradle the precious growing fruits.



Containers: Squash does not readily grow well in containers, 15+ gallons is needed even for more compact bush varieties. Feed often.

Pests: Prevent cucurbit pests like the Cucumber Beetle and the Squash Vine Borer by using row covers and then removing them once squash flowers blossom.

Diseases: Look for evidence of powdery mildew & downy mildew, bacterial wilt & fusarium wilt, and finally phytophthora.

HARVEST



Between summer and winter squash, there are huge differences in optimal harvest time.

Color change is not always an indicator of squash ripeness.

For summer squash: These varieties can be enjoyed during different stages of maturity, with some even preferring the younger fruits. Left to grow too long and the rind becomes tougher and less appealing.

For winter squash: Taking anywhere from 60-100+ days to mature, these are often harvested once fully mature, when the rind hardens. Check the 'days to harvest' time on your seed packet and plan to harvest before first fall frost.

Curing & storing: Most winter squash cultivars need a period of time to 'cure' in a warm place before storing long-term in a cooler environment for winter.



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SAVE

Squash is insect-pollinated, isolation is needed to prevent hybrids.



1 Let the rind harden on the squash before harvesting, allowing the seed to fully mature.



2 Cut the squash in half lengthwise. Scoop the seeds into a bowl. Pour water in the bowl & separate seeds from the plant material. Pat seeds dry with a cloth or paper towel.



3 Seed can be stored for up to 5 years in a cool, dry place.



Preserving the harvest: Squash can be sliced and eaten right off the vine, but there are other ways to preserve the harvest!

Cut squash into desired shape and blanch before freezing, or puree and freeze for use in future soups.

Always check to make sure your squash is not moldy or spoiled before preserving.

TYPES

Summer squash: Summer varieties can be grown in succession, producing fruits all summer long. Most summer squashes are bush varieties. They have more tender fruits than winter squash types.

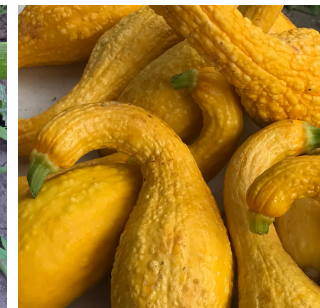
Winter squash: Long-season varieties, usually planted for fall harvest and have tougher skin for winter storage. Most winter squash are vining varieties.

Bush types: Growing only 2-3' wide and tall, these varieties are the best choice for container gardening.

Vine types: Vining types often grow 6'+ tall but can be trellised to save space. In a Three Sisters garden, vining squash is usually sown at the same time as beans.



Zucchini



Crookneck Yellow squash



Assorted *Cucurbita maxima*



Butternut squash