

Squash, summer

Cucurbita pepo

Summer squash, unlike winter squash, are harvested when their rinds are soft. Included in this clan are round and club-shaped zucchini in colors ranging from gold to nearly black, yellow crookneck squash, and scalloped pattypan. Just a handful of summer squash seeds will produce an abundant yield.

TIP – For a culinary treat, harvest a few male blossoms, stuff them with a soft cheese, and batter-fry them.

Location and soil Plant summer squash in full sun in soil that is well drained. Give plants plenty of space—most varieties have bush rather than vining habits, but even bush types grow to 3 feet or more in diameter.

When to Plant Sow seeds directly into the garden after danger of frost; soil should be 65°F or warmer. Seeds can also be planted indoors in biodegradable pots (made from peat or other fibers) 3 weeks before the outdoor planting date.

Seed depth and Spacing Sow 4-5 seeds 1 inch deep in hills spaced about 4 feet apart.

Germination Seed germinates in less than a week in soil that is 70° to 85°F, but will take longer in colder soil. Little or no germination will occur in soils that are 60° or colder.

Thinning Thin seedlings when they have 2-3 true leaves, leaving the strongest 2-3 plants per hill.

Care Water deeply at planting time and whenever the “finger test” shows that the soil is dry 3-4 inches below the surface. In most situations, weekly watering will suffice. Cover young plants with row cover to exclude pests.

Pests If plants suddenly wilt, squash vine borers are the likely culprit. The larval stage of the squash vine borer moth chews the insides of stalks at the base of the plant, disrupting the flow of water and nutrients. Plant successive crops for an uninterrupted yield, or encourage secondary rooting by heaping soil over a section of vine where a leaf stem emerges. Squash bug invasions can also cause damage. Inspect undersides of leaves for rows of coppery eggs, and crush them. Plant rotation will help prevent pest problems.

Fertilize Add a generous amount of compost to the soil prior to planting, and side-dress with compost or a balanced fertilizer when the first flowers appear.

Harvest Check plants every day or two, and harvest the fruits when they are small and tender.

Nutrition Summer squash is a source of vitamin C, and provides a good supply of potassium, manganese, and other essential minerals.

	Dark Green Zucchini	Early Prolific Straightneck AAS Winner, 1938	Grey Zucchini	Ronde de Nice
				
Description	Classic zucchini; dependable and high yielding.	Popular yellow-skinned heirloom; dependable producer.	Open-pollinated type available since the 1950s; mottled grey fruits.	Popular heirloom; round fruit, green with white speckles.
Fruit size	Best at 6-8 inches	Best at 4-7 inches	Best at 4-6 inches	Best at 3-4 inches
Comments	Vigorous bush habit.	Bush-type plants are fairly compact.	Semi-bush type; long yielding.	Good stuffed and baked.
Harvest	50 days	50 days	45 days	50 days