

Organic Summer Squash:

Growing and Seed Saving Information



Types of Summer Squash

Summer squashes (*Cucurbita pepo*) are warm-season annuals in the *Cucurbitaceae* family, which includes cucumbers, melons, winter squash, and gourds. Commonly grown types include:

- Zucchini
- Crookneck
- Specialty types can be scalloped, round or pale green.

Soil and Nutrient Requirements

Plants need loose, fertile, well drained soil with plenty of nitrogen and a pH 5.8-6.8. Fertilize seedlings with fish emulsion if leaves yellow.

Position

Full Sun

Seeding Depth

1/2-1"

Seeding Rate

Direct seeding: 2-3 seeds every 12-24", thin to 1 plant

Plant Spacing

12-24"

Row Spacing

5-6'.

When to Sow

Days to maturity are from direct seeding, subtract 2 weeks if transplanting. Direct seed as soon as chance of all frost has passed or start transplants 3-4 weeks before planting date. Optimum soil temperature for germination is about 85°F and little or no germination occurs below 60°F. Harden off plants by reducing temperature, water, and fertilizer. Many growers plant multiple successions of summer squash during a season to ensure continuous harvest, transplanting the first succession immediately after frost-free day and the final succession three months before the expected first frost.

Other Considerations

Black plastic mulch and floating row cover can be used to increase soil and air temperature, as well as ward off cucumber beetles which feast on young seedlings and also spread disease.

Frost Tolerant

No. Plants will die.

Drought Tolerant

Uneven moisture causes misshapen fruit.

Heat Tolerant

Yes.

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Seed Specs

Zucchini- 155-260 seeds/oz. (185 avg), 2,500-4,200 (3,000 avg) seeds/lb; Summer Squash- 262-375 seeds/oz (280 avg), 4,200-6,000 (4,500 avg) seeds/lb; Scallopini- 262-355 seeds/oz (300 avg), 4,200-5,700 (4,800 avg) seeds/lb;

Seeding Rate

Zucchini- 12,000 seeds/acre (4 lbs), using 2 seeds every 18", 5' centers. Summer Squash- 12,000 seeds/acre (2.7 lbs), using 2 seeds every 18", 5' centers. Scallopini- 12,000 seeds/acre (2.5 lbs), using 2 seeds every 18", 5' centers.

Harvest

Best quality fruit are harvested at 5 – 8" or smaller, while skin is soft and somewhat glossy. Harvest fruits every other day to for best size and quality and to maintain plants' productivity.

Storage

Fruits are very perishable, but will store 3 to 4 days at 35 - 40°F and 90% relative humidity.

Pest Info

- Striped Cucumber beetle feeding can damage young leaves so extensively that plants either die or are stunted in growth. Dipping or spraying seedlings with kaolin clay can significantly deter infestations. Combine clay with insecticidal soap (such as Safer Brand™, see Supplies) or neem (such as Ahimsa Neem Oil). Use of a trap crop preferred by cucumber beetles, such as blue hubbard squash, lures beetles away from main crop. Crop rotation, removal of crop debris to discourage overwintering populations, and use of floating row cover can be effective in controlling cucumber beetles.
- Squash vine borer will cause plants to look wilted even when moisture is plentiful. Slice open stem and remove and destroy.
- Squash bugs can be controlled by handpicking. Bury or compost plant residues at the end of the season.

Disease Info

- Powdery mildew can be checked by providing good air circulation. Give plants wide spacing and eliminate weeds, especially milkweed, marshcress and yellowrocket. Choose resistant varieties.
- Fruit rots such as anthracnose, scab, and fusarium fruit rot are common under wet conditions. Space plants apart, avoid wetting foliage and water early in the day so that leaves can dry.
- Fusarium Wilt is caused by the fungus *Fusarium oxysporum f. sp. Melonis (Fom)*, and can be seed and/or soil borne.
- Bacterial Wilt and Cucumber mosaic virus should be controlled by removing and destroying infected plants.

Seed Saving Instructions

Insect pollinated. Take caution unless you are hand pollinating, as many summer squash varieties are the same species as many pumpkins and winter squashes. Different varieties of the same species need to be isolated by 1/4 mile to prevent cross-pollination. Barriers such as tree lines, woods or buildings existing between the fields can reduce this distance. Treat summer squash the same as usually done for winter storage of squashes and pumpkins, allowing summer squash varieties to grow to a large size with a hard outside skin. After all squashes have reached this stage, harvest and let them sit for a period of after-ripening for 3-6 weeks or up to several months. Remove the seeds, rinse in water and dry. Use of a 1/2" and 1/4" screen can help with cleaning. Squash seeds remain viable for 6 years under cool and dry storage conditions.