How to Plant, Grow, and Harvest Squash

How to Plant Squash

Plant seeds ½ to 1 inch deep either in cells to *transplant later or directly into the garden bed. Loosely cover with soil and gently water. Plants eventually need to be at least two feet apart, so plant your seeds, or transplant your seedlings accordingly. Seeds should germinate in 5 to 10 days.

*Transplanting* is starting seeds in small containers indoors or in a greenhouse to protect from the elements until they are grown enough to be planted into the ground or garden bed. Many schools use milk cartons that otherwise would've been thrown out for this purpose, instead of buying plastic pots.

How to Harvest Squash

Small summer squash and zucchini are more tender and flavorful. They’re best up to six to eight inches, and will lose their flavor if they get any larger. Once the plants start producing fruits they’ll grow quickly so check them daily.

If you run into an oversized one, immediately cut it off the plant so that it doesn’t take up any more of the plant’s nutrients or water. The skin on summer squashes is thin and tender, so handle them carefully.

Tip!

Oversized zucchini can be used to make zucchini bread!

How to Care for Squash Plants

Summer squashes are susceptible to pests and disease, but otherwise, they’re easy to grow! You can protect young squash plants from some pests by covering them with a floating row cover or a translucent, light fabric, such as a sheet. Remove this cover when the plants start flowering so that pollinators, like bees and beetles, can pollinate the blooms.

Squash plants require pollination between the male and female flowers to produce fruit. Planting squash at least two feet of space apart helps with air circulation and disease prevention. Keep plants well-watered to avoid drought stress. Use drip irrigation or hand water the soil around the base of the plants, being careful not to wet the leaves. If you notice discolored or distorted leaves, remove them from the plant and the area. You can put mulch around the base of squash plants to help the soil retain water. If possible, use a denser, finer material such as compost, rather than a coarse material like wood chips where pests can hide.

Companion Planting

Companion plants assist in the growth of other plants, by deterring certain pests and/or attracting beneficial insects. Consider planting these friends of squash in your garden: radishes, sweet corn, tansy, nasturtium, borage, clover, and calendula.

When to Plant Squash

All squash varieties are warm season annuals. Plant in the spring after the last danger of frost has passed and again in the late summer for a fall harvest. For an October harvest of summer squash varieties, transplant or direct seed in mid to late August through the first week of September. The soil needs to be warm (at least 60°F) for squash seeds to germinate.

Where to Plant Squash

Plant your squash seeds or transplants in a sunny spot with fertile soil that drains well. Consider adding compost to the soil before planting. Avoid planting your squash where other cucurbits (squash, cucumbers, watermelons...etc.) were recently growing to prevent disease and depletion of key nutrients in the soil.

Containers

Squash plants prefer to grow in the ground, but can be grown in containers that are very large and deep (at least 10 to 20 gallons) with drainage holes.

Tip!

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