



Summer Vegetable Gardening Tips from Joyce Gemmell

Winter Squash Cucurbitaceae Family

The CUCURBITACEAE family has many forms and has been feeding the world since the beginning of recorded history. The remains of cucumbers and gourds have been found in archaeological excavations dating two centuries before Christ. Members of this family have origins in many different regions of the world. Only the cucurbita genus is thought to originate in North, Central and South America.



Squashes belong to the Cucurbitaceae family along with the melons, cucumbers, gourds and pumpkins. They are also divided into short and long maturities. The genera *Citrullus* and *Cucumis* include watermelons, cantaloupe and cucumbers. The genus *Cucurbita* includes winter and summer squash and some gourds, while the chayote is a *Sechium* and sponge gourd is a *Luffa*. In the Genus *Cucurbita* there are six species of squash, three of which we will deal with here:

- C. maxima* includes banana, hubbard, marrow, and turban squash, and some European pumpkins.
- C. moschata* includes all the butternuts, cheese and the melon squash or Tahitian.
- C. mixta* includes Southwest Indian varieties, cushaws, except Golden cushaw which is a *C. moschata*.

Different varieties within an individual species will cross-pollinate but there is no crossing between varieties of different species. Remember that when a cross occurs you cannot see the change in that summer's fruit, but it will show up if you save the seed and plant it the next year.

Planting Dates:

Coastal region: April to June.

Inland Region: April to June.

WINTER SQUASH are mostly vining types, with fruit that is dryer and richer in flavor than summer varieties. Although called winter squash the seed is planted after the soil has warmed in the spring but harvested as much as 2 months later than the summer type. Popular varieties are banana, butternut, buttercup, acorn, delicata, hubbard and Tahitian. Some plants are dwarf and some plants grow four feet square.

Plants can be seeded in containers to get an early start. Plant under floating row cover fabric (like Reemay) or clear plastic tunnels. You can direct seed in garden soil after night temperatures are above 55 degrees. Prepare a 4 foot diameter basin, mix in one wheelbarrow-full of composted manure or half steer and half compost mixed with the soil from the hole. Settle soil with a good watering. Plant 4-6 seeds a few inches apart, and keep the two strongest plants. Mulch when plants have 5 leaves.



After a few fruit have set, pinch off the fuzzy ends of the vines. Harvest after maturity date has been reached (depends on variety). When harvesting, leave a 2-inch stem on the fruit - handle with care so as not to bruise. Cure a week or two in a warm, well-ventilated place before storage.



Also check out ...

UC websites for the Vegetable Research and Information Center (<http://vric.ucdavis.edu>) and Integrated Pest Management (www.ipm.ucdavis.edu)

Nutritional Information...

1 cup butternut baked, 205 g

| | |
|----------------------|-------------|
| Calories | 82 Calories |
| Protein | 1.84 g |
| Carbohydrate | 21.50 g |
| Total Fat | 0.18 g |
| Fiber, total dietary | 6.6 g |

| | |
|------------|---------|
| Calcium | 84 mg |
| Iron | 1.23 mg |
| Potassium | 582 mg |
| Magnesium | 59 mg |
| Phosphorus | 55 mg |
| Sodium | 8 mg |
| Zinc | 0.27 mg |

| | |
|------------|----------|
| Vitamin A | 22868 IU |
| Vitamin B6 | 0.254 mg |
| Vitamin C | 31 mg |
| Folate | 39 mcg |
| Niacin | 1.986 mg |
| Riboflavin | 0.035 mg |
| Thiamin | 0.148 mg |

Source: USDA Database

