

## GROWING GUIDE FOR WINTER SQUASH

<b>Binomial Name:</b>	Cucurbita
<b>Varieties:</b>	Waltham Butternut, Hundredweight Pumpkin, Flat White Boer Pumpkin, Queensland Blue Pumpkin
<b>Start:</b>	Seed or seedling
<b>Germination:</b>	5 - 10 days, 15°C to 40°C
<b>Seed Life (viability):</b>	6 years
<b>Soil:</b>	Well drained, high fertility
<b>Sunlight:</b>	Full sun
<b>Sow Seeds:</b>	15 - 30cm apart
<b>Transplant/Thin to:</b>	45 - 90cm apart
<b>Ave. Days to Harvest:</b>	90 - 100
<b>Good Companions:</b>	Beans, lettuce, marjoram, nasturtium, peas, petunia, radish, sunflower, corn, yarrow
<b>Bad Companions:</b>	Potato, sage

Winter squash are easy to grow -- if you have the space. Winter squashes differ from the summer squashes, not by the season that they are grown in (they are both grown during the warm summer season by the way) but rather by the stage that they are harvested and by the type of skin that they have.

Winter squashes are left on the plant to mature and to develop their thick, hard skins (like pumpkins and butternuts). The Summer squashes on the other hand, are harvested when they are still immature and when their skin is still soft and tender (patty pans and courgettes / zucchini are summer squashes).

In addition to the familiar butternut, pumpkin and acorn squashes, winter squash varieties come in a staggering diversity of fruit size, shape and colour.

### Sowing & Planting:

Winter squashes like warm soil and are very sensitive to frost so don't be in a rush to plant too early in spring. Wait until danger of frost has passed and soil has warmed to about 21°C, or about 2 weeks after the last frost date.

Unless you are trying to grow a long-season variety in an area that gets early frosts there's really no need to start winter squash inside. Instead, direct seed 1 to 3cm deep into hills (which warm and drain earlier in the season) or rows. Sow 4 to 5 seeds per hill. Space hills about 120 to 240cm apart, depending on the size of the fruit, the larger the expected size of the squash, the larger the vine and the farther apart you should space the hills).

When the plants are 5 to 8cm tall, thin to 2 to 3 plants per hill by snipping off unwanted plants without disturbing the roots of the remaining ones. In rows, sow seeds 15 to 30cm apart in rows 120 to 240cm apart. Snip off plants to thin to one plant every 45 to 90cm.

If you need to start plants early, plant inside in 5 to 10cm pots or cells 3 to 4 weeks before transplanting outside. Sow 3 or 4 seeds per pot and thin to one or two plants by snipping off

the weaker plants to avoid damaging the roots of those that remain. Harden off by cutting back on water and reducing temperature before transplanting. Plant transplants out in the garden, at the same final spacing's as above, after all danger of frost has passed.

### **Growing:**

Use row covers to protect plants early in the season and to prevent any insect problems. Remove the covers before flowering, to allow pollination by insects, or as soon as hot weather arrives.

Tip: Squash plants have both male and female flowers. The male flowers often blossom first, sometimes as much as two to three weeks before any female flowers start to appear. You will recognise the female flowers once they finally blossom as they form on the ends of the immature fruits and, once pollinated, then fall off as the fruit develops. The first fruits can sometimes be wrinkled, turn black or rot due to poor pollination.

Mulching the plants will help retain moisture in the soil and suppress weeds. Mounding soil around the base of the plants can discourage squash borers from laying eggs. Scan for pests every time you go out into the garden. Squash bugs begin to infest the vines as soon as the blossoms appear. They are usually in large groups and can damage the plant and the mature fruit.

Check with your local garden centre or nursery for the proper course of treatment for these pests because the sooner you get rid of them, the healthier your squash plants will be. Mildew can also be a problem on squash plants. A copper soap spray or a homemade solution of 1 part milk to 10 parts water will help to keep mildew at bay.

At the end of the season, remove all of the vines to reduce the chances of any mildew spreading.

### **Harvesting:**

When the stems turn a light green-yellow colour the squash should be fully ripe. The rind will be thick and tough. Cut, do not pull, the ripe fruit from the plant. 5 to 8cm of stem must remain for proper storing. This may also help increase the sugar content.

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