



Summer Squash: Don't Just Settle for Zucchini

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Summer squashes come in many different sizes, colors, and shapes. They all belong to the Gourd (Cucurbit) Family with other edibles like cucumbers, melons, pumpkins, and winter squash. Some typical names include: cocozelle, crookneck, Italian marrow, Patty pan, scallop, straightneck, vegetable marrow and zucchini. Grow a few kinds and you've got plenty of variety for your summer barbecues, salads, and dishes.

Summer squash is easy to grow from seed.

- Plant when soils have warmed up to 60 degrees, which is typically mid April for gardens in the San Joaquin Valley. Choose a site in your garden that gets full sun.
- Nearly all modern varieties of summer squash form compact bushes, but they still need plenty of room to grow so allow at least a 3-4 foot square for each bush. Plant 2 squash seeds an inch deep and a couple of inches apart in the center of the square.
- When you water the first time thoroughly soak the area close to the seeds; subsequently drip or sprinkle lightly to keep the seed bed moist so that the first true leaves can come popping through the soil's crust with ease. This usually takes about a week. Eventually you will thin out (remove) one of the two plants if both seeds germinate, emerge, and start growing. From then on water deeply once a week and avoid keeping the surface wet. If using drip, place the emitter several inches away from the base of the plant.
- Squash produce individual male and female flowers on the same plant. Be happy when bees and beetles visit the flowers as they will ensure pollination. When temperatures get too hot, the pollen may die before they fully pollinate the female flowers and fruit may be misshapen.
- Summer squash plants produce heavily and need a little dose of fertilizer every 3-4 weeks.
- Harvest fruits within a couple of days after they appear. Most oblong varieties taste best when less than 6-inches long, the round ones 4-inches across, and scallops 3-inches across.
- For continual production of new fruit be sure to remove old fruit before they reach a foot in length, even if you can't use all of the produce.

As with other vegetables summer squash can encounter a couple of problems during the growing season.

Powdery mildew is a common disease in squash because it thrives in California's dry summer conditions. It starts to show up when nights are hot and humid. Several least-toxic fungicides eradicate and protect from disease, including horticultural oils, neem oil, and jojoba oil.

Viruses are transmitted by insects, such as aphids, whiteflies, and cucumber beetles. Symptoms include color mottling and distortion of leaves. Remove infected plants as soon as they are

detected. It is not practical to try to control virus diseases by using insecticides to control insects. Covering young plants with a spun polyester row cover can also protect them from insects. Summer plantings usually encounter more virus problems than spring plantings.

Squash bugs and cucumber beetles eventually become a nuisance. Handpick adult bugs and nymphs (young bugs); search for and destroy eggs in the spring and early summer. Garden insecticides are not very effective, especially on larger bugs, so go after young insects with insecticidal soaps or neem oil.

Here's a small selection of available varieties.

Oblong – zucchini shape

'Sure Thing' is a dark green zucchini with light splotches that sets fruit even if flowers are not pollinated. Also available are Aristocrat, Black Beauty, Space Miser and Spineless Beauty. 'Gold Rush' is bright yellow and 'Caserta' squash are pale green with dark green stripes throughout. Bicolored 'Zephyr' is a warm yellow fruit with a pale green blossom end. It looks like it's been dipped in green.



Globe or round

'Eight Ball' is a round hybrid dark green zucchini. 'Ronde de Nice' is a round French heirloom with attractive striped and blotched green skin tones.



Elliptical summer squash - 'Sun Drop' is light yellow.

Crookneck – 'Yellow Crookneck' is the classic variety also 'Fancy Crook'.

Patty pan – scalloped edge disks

'Sunny Delight' is a yellow variety that is resistant to the cucumber mosaic virus, another yellow is Sunburst and Starship is dark green.



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