



Gadzooks! The Great Zucchini!

by Bev Servadio, UC Master Gardener

If I were allowed to plant only one vegetable in garden, it would be the zucchini. Most of the varieties are prolific producers and enable me to share the wealth for the majority of the summer/fall season. We plant in one garden bed location in May and then plant in another towards the last part of July. Why so much? Because of what you can do with it.

It can be eaten raw, or steamed with a little dusting of seasoning for a vegetable side dish. It is included in every pasta sauce, soup, and stew that we prepare. For favorite dishes made with the larger zukes – try slicing, brush with a little garlic olive oil and grill, or scoop out the seed cavity and then stuff with your favorite meat and cheese mixture and bake. We make pickles and relishes out of them. Did I say bake...how about zucchini bread or chocolate zucchini cake?

I'm not done – slice it thin, toss it in a bit of seasoning and bake on low until you have zucchini chips! And let's not forget that edible bloom – so many ways to include this showy garden gift.

Plant zucchini seeds directly into your sunny, well-draining garden bed. Prepare the bed before planting by adding a rich compost blend and peat moss to the soil. A good balance would be 1 part soil to 1 part combined organic matter. I plan on 4 zucchini plants in my 4' x 4' Square Foot Garden bed. That allows each plant 4 square feet of space to grow and have good air circulation.

Plant two or three seeds in a low mound. After one set of true leaves, thin by cutting to the strongest plant per mound. If using zucchini transplants, place one per low mound. Slow, deep watering is needed regularly to keep your zucchini healthy and productive. Adding fertilizer probably won't be necessary.

As part of my edible landscape, the zucchini becomes that specimen dream plant. With big, bold leaves and huge, brilliant yellow blooms it keeps that title all season long. And, it feeds my family.

Seeds and transplants are available at your local nurseries and big box stores. Here are our family favorites.

Italian Zucchini Romanesco. This is a delicious favorite with a taste described as nutty/sweet. It has a beautiful skin that is tender, ribbed, with green flecked tones between the ribbings. It is a big plant, high yielder and is disease resistant. The fruit retains its flavor even when



much larger than normal picking size. An extra attraction is that the edible blossoms are long-holding. Days to maturity – 50.



Raven. This is a smooth-skinned zucchini with what is described as meaty and full flavored. It has a compact upright growing habit which makes it perfect for the Square Foot Garden or including it in your landscape. It is about 2 ft high by 3 ft wide and the fruit is about 7” to 8” long. The Raven is known for producing late into the fall season, weeks after most other varieties have finished. Days to maturity – 43.

Black Beauty. A great zucchini that was the 1957 All America Selections winner. This is most likely the zucchini that our generation grew up with. Very prolific heirloom variety with very dark green skin and creamy white flesh. This fast-growing plant with 6” to 8” fruit is easy to grow and freezes well. Days to maturity – 48.



Come meet Bev Servadio and many other Master Gardeners at the Tulare Garden Festival on Saturday, May 11, from 10am to 2pm at Zumwalt Park (on Tulare Ave and M St) in downtown Tulare. Ask the Master Gardeners your gardening questions. We have information on how to choose and grow flowers, fruit, and landscape trees, herbs, lawns, roses, succulents and vegetables in your home garden. We also have advice on how to manage insects, diseases, and weeds in your home landscape. Come out and see our table top displays and bring the kids, we’ll keep everyone busy!

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