



Ventura Garden to Table Series – Squash

Squash (*Cucurbita*) is in the gourd family (*Cucurbitaceae*) – they love full sun (minimum 6 hours), are heavy feeders, and both summer and winter varieties thrive in Ventura County's mild Mediterranean climate.

What is “Three Sisters” Planting?

- A Native American companion planting method combining **corn, beans, and squash** in the same bed.
 - **Corn** – planted first and acts as a natural trellis for beans to climb.
 - **Beans** – fix nitrogen in the soil, benefiting all three crops.
 - **Squash** – planted last; large leaves shade the soil, suppressing weeds and retaining moisture.
- This works best with **dry corn and dry beans**, which all mature at the same time as winter squash. If growing sweet corn and snap beans, consider planting them separately from squash.

A Note on Cross-Pollination

- Only varieties of the **same species** can cross-pollinate with each other.
- Current season fruits remain true to type – cross-pollination only affects seeds saved for the next generation.
- Squash fall into four species that do not cross with each other:
 - *Cucurbita pepo* – zucchini, acorn squash, pumpkins, delicata
 - *Cucurbita maxima* – hubbard, buttercup, kabocha
 - *Cucurbita moschata* – butternut
 - *Cucurbita argyrosperma* – cushaw

Summer Squash (*Cucurbita pepo*)

- Plant when soil is at least 60°F; days to maturity: 50–65 days.
- Grows on non-vining **bushes** – well suited to smaller garden spaces.
- Harvest **young and tender** for best flavor; frequent harvesting encourages the plant to keep producing.
- Look for **disease-resistant** varieties when possible (powdery mildew, mosaic viruses).
- Different varieties can be grown together – cross-pollination only affects saved seeds, not this season's harvest.

Summer Squash – Varieties to Consider

Zucchini:

- **Black Beauty** – Classic dark green; excellent flavor and texture, a reliable standard.
- **Aristocrat** – Compact, bushy, disease-resistant; high yield; good for small gardens.
- **Cocozelle** – Italian heirloom with striped skin; excellent grilled or roasted.
- **Magda** – Pale green, bulbous shape; popular in Middle Eastern cooking, good stuffed.
- **Greyzini** – Hybrid; light green with grey mottling; rich, nutty flavor.
- **Fordhook** – Classic dark green bush type with vigorous growth.



Scallop (Pattypan):

- **Peter Pan Hybrid** – Compact bush, sweet flavor; good for containers.
- **Sunburst** – Bright yellow with dark green markings; nutty flavor, very ornamental.
- **Early White Bush** – Available in white, yellow, or green; classic scallop shape.
- **Scallopini** – Peter Pan style in multiple colors; productive and attractive.

Yellow Squash:

- **Early Prolific Straightneck** – High yield; buttery, with a nutty flavor.
- **Early Golden Summer Crookneck** – Heirloom; bumpy skin and tender flesh.
- **Golden Egg** – Round, egg-shaped; creamy texture – a fun conversation starter.
- **Sundance** – Hybrid crookneck; bright yellow and consistently productive.

Winter Squash (Cucurbitaceae – Gourd Family)

- Start seeds indoors: **March – April**; direct sow outdoors: **April – June**.
- Days to maturity: **75–120 days** – patience is rewarded with exceptional storage life.
- Can be grown **vertically** on a trellis; use fabric slings to support heavy fruit.
- Rotate fruit on the vine to promote **uniform color development**.
- Leave on vine until **fully mature** – the skin should be very hard (test with your thumbnail).
- After harvest, **cure in the sun for 2 weeks** to toughen the skin; properly cured squash stores for 2–6 months.

Winter Squash – Varieties to Consider

Butternut (*Cucurbita moschata*) – rich, dense, sweet flavor; excellent for soups, roasting, and long storage:

- **Waltham Butternut** – The classic standard; reliable, and high-yielding.
- **Honeynut** – Miniature butternut; intensely sweet flavor, perfect for single servings.
- **Victory Early Butternut** – Earlier maturing than Waltham; a good choice for Ventura's seasons.
- **Speckled Hound** – Beautiful tan and green speckled skin; sweet orange flesh – ornamental too.

Delicata (*Cucurbita pepo*) – thin, edible skin; naturally sweet; no peeling required – a home cook's favorite:

- **Candystick Dessert** – Extra-sweet flesh; cream-colored with green stripes, very ornamental.
- **Honey Boat** – Exceptionally sweet and compact; ideal for small gardens.
- **Bush Delicata** – Compact bush (not vining) – perfect for raised beds and containers.

Basic Care: QR code will take you to the Soil to Sprouts slide deck on the Ventura County Master Gardener website

- **Seeds or Transplant** – Both work well; transplants give an earlier harvest. Direct sow when soil reaches 60°F+.
- **Mulch the Soil Surface** – Apply a 3–4-inch layer of organic mulch to retain moisture and suppress weeds.





- **Watering** – Water deeply at the base; avoid overhead watering which promotes powdery mildew and other diseases.
- **Support** – Winter squash grown vertically need a trellis or cage; use fabric slings for heavy fruit.
- **Fertilizer** – Use a balanced fertilizer (10-10-10) at planting; switch to lower nitrogen once flowering begins to encourage fruit set rather than leafy growth.
- **Raised Beds or Containers** – Summer squash and compact varieties do well in large containers (15+ gallons); use potting soil or a blend of compost/topsoil/vermiculite.
- **Pests** – Watch for squash vine borer, squash bugs, and cucumber beetles. Powdery mildew is common in late season – choose resistant varieties when possible.

Harvesting:

- Summer squash: harvest when **young and tender** (6–8 inches for zucchini); check plants **daily** in peak season – they grow fast!
- Winter squash: leave on vine until fully mature; press your thumbnail into the skin – it should not indent.
- Fresh summer squash – store in refrigerator at 45–55°F with moderate humidity; use within 1–2 weeks.
- Cured winter squash – store in a cool, dry location (50–55°F) for 2–6 months depending on variety.
- Do not store near apples or bananas – ethylene gas released by these fruits can accelerate decay in squash.

Learn more about the Ventura
County Master Gardener using this
QR to visit the website.

