

SQUASH

Two main types of squash are grown in Kansas gardens. Summer squash are used in their young or immature stage and grow on compact, nonsprawling vines, while winter squash are used at their mature stage and grow on trailing vines. The general culture and care are similar for both types.

Varieties

Summer Squash--Summer Crookneck, Prolific Straightneck, zucchini (several hybrid varieties vary, depending on color and shape), Eldorado (yellow zucchini), Sunburst (yellow scallop).

Winter Squash--Royal Acorn, Ebony Acorn, and Table Queen, Butternut (several hybrid varieties), Improved Green Hubbard, Pink Banana, Striped Cushaw, Spaghetti Squash.

When to plant

Squash are warm- season crops that are damaged by freezes. Plant after all danger of frost has passed; early May is a traditional planting time. A planting of summer squash for a fall harvest can be made in early August. Fall plantings of winter squash should be made in mid- to late May.

Spacing

Summer squash can be planted 2 feet apart in rows at least 3 feet apart. Winter squash need more room for their sprawling vines, with 3-4 feet between plants in rows at least 6 feet apart.

Care

Weeds compete with squash plants, making shallow cultivation essential, especially early in the season. Squash benefit from the soil-warming and weed-control properties of black plastic mulch. Once full vine spread is achieved, little additional care is necessary. When plants are established, squash are fairly tolerant of drier soil conditions. Squash, like other

relatives such as cucumber, muskmelon, and watermelon, have separate male and female flowers on the same plant. Bees are required to transfer pollen from flower to flower. Male flowers usually appear first, and there are more male than female flowers.

Harvesting

Summer squash are harvested at an immature stage--before the skin and seeds have toughened. Usually harvesting when they are 6-10 inches long is preferable. Squash develop quickly, and regular harvesting is important.

Winter squash are harvested at maturity--after the rind or skin is tough. Check the development by trying to penetrate the skin with your fingernail. Immediately after harvesting, allow winter squash to further dry by storing them at 70-80° F in a dry location for 2-3 weeks before moving them to storage areas such as a basement where temperatures are 50-60° F. This "curing" process allows squash rind to toughen.

Winter squash can be stored for 4-8 months. Summer squash should be stored in a refrigerator for only a short time because they are prone to drying out.

Common concerns

Squash bugs

Powdery mildew

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