



Squash

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Name: Squash *Cucurbita pepo* (Cucurbitaceae).

Origin: The squash or scallop is one of the oldest cultivar groups of *C. pepo*. The first drawing of a scallop form appeared in 1554 and again in Siciliana in 1651.

Distribution: Commonly found in the United Kingdom, Northern Europe, Canada and North America.

Australian Distribution: Squash is grown in all horticultural production areas including Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Tasmania.

Preferred Climate and Soil Types: Squash is suited to a wide variety of soil types. It is planted in light textured soils such as in Northern Territory soils, which increases the chances of an earlier crop.

Description: Squash is an outstanding summer yielding vegetable. Generally plants are of bush and trailing types but the bush type is more common and popular. The stems are hard ribbed and furrowed, frequently five sided and spiny. The leaves are deeply serrated with 3-7 lobes. The fruit has much softer skin and matures earlier than pumpkins but don't keep as well. Squash prefers a soil pH level greater than 5.5.

Varieties: There are two types, the green button squash and yellow button squash with a cultivar called yellow ruffles. Consult your seed supplier for current varieties of squash.

Culture: Plants are normally planted on raised beds, and black plastic is laid over the bed. The use of black plastic mulch is used to conserve moisture and help control weeds in the row. Spacing of the plants or seeds in the row depends on the growth habit of the type of squash grown. For bush type squash, hills of two plants should be spaced 3 to 4 feet apart with rows on 1.8 m centres.

The vining types of squash need the extra space and will invade even more space if allowed, so plan and plant accordingly. Water requirements are high and it is essential to maintain the soil moisture during hot weather and when fruit is filling out. Failure to do so often results in shedding of flowers and partly formed fruit.

Pests and Diseases: Important insect pests of squash are cucumber moth, grasshoppers, wireworm, pumpkin beetle, 28 spotted ladybug, myrids and thrips. Important diseases are powdery mildew, pythium, black rot and gummy stem blights, wilt and blossom end rot.

Fruiting Season: In the Northern Territory squash is usually planted in the dry season from May to September.

Harvesting: When squash reaches about 4 to 7.5 cm in width it is ready for picking, usually within 60 to 70 days of planting. Picking should be done regularly, at least every day as the fruit develops. Once production increases so does the picking frequency.

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When the crop is in peak production picking twice per day is fairly common. Squash have a very intensive labour requirement, as it needs to be harvested more frequently than most crops. It is good practice to remove larger and unmarketable fruit from the bush, as if the squash is allowed to mature on the bush flowering and fruit set will cease.

Storage Conditions: Once squash is harvested it needs to be placed in the cool room to drop its temperature before packing otherwise the squash will sweat and become unmarketable. To store squash for 3-4 days the cool room needs to be set at a range of 0-4.4°C and a relative humidity of 80-100%.

Culinary Use: Squash can be prepared in many different ways including boiled, stuffed, roasted, stir-fried etc.