



The Phantom Gardener

Organic from the start, sustainable for the future

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Squash

A list of the most productive vegetable plants would have to include squash. Zucchini, summer squash, crooknecks, pattypan — they all provide an abundant harvest. Squashes grow best during the long, hot days of summer, with maximum sunshine and warm nights. The plants won't tolerate cold temperatures.

1. Prepare. Loosen soil to a depth of 8 to 10 inches using a shovel or tiller. Mix in some compost or slow-release fertilizer to provide plants with nutrients. Then rake the soil smooth, removing any large clumps and rocks.

2. Plant. There are squash varieties that form long vines and bush varieties that form a low mound. Sow squash seeds in a row, about an inch deep and 6 inches apart. Or, plant them in hills (flat-topped mounds), sowing 4 to 6 seeds in a 3-foot-diameter hill. To plant, either poke a hole with your finger and place the seed in the hole, or use a hoe to create a shallow furrow. Cover seed with soil and press gently.

3. Grow. Once seedlings are a few inches tall, thin them by removing extra plants so the remaining ones are about 2 feet apart, or 2 to 3 plants per hill. Water soil to keep it moist. Pull weeds that sprout nearby. Apply organic mulch, like bark chips, to control weeds and conserve soil moisture, keeping the mulch an inch or two from stems.

4. Enjoy. Harvest squash when they're small and tender. If any get too large, harvest and discard rather than letting them remain on the vine. Frequent harvesting encourages plants to continue producing.

At a glance

Exposure:
Full sun

Planting time:
After last spring frost
(usually after May 15th)

Planting depth:
1 inch deep

Spacing in row:
6 inches apart; thin to
2 feet apart or 2 to 3
plants per hill

Time to harvest:
50 to 65 days,
depending on variety.

Bush varieties grow
well in containers.

