



SQUASHES & PUMPKINS

All pumpkins, squashes and gourds are members of the cucurbit family (Cucurbitaceae) which also includes watermelons, cantaloupes, and cucumbers. This group of plants produces separate male and female flowers on the same plant (monoecious), with the female flowers usually appearing several days before the male flowers. These early female flowers usually drop off until the male flowers appear to pollinate them and begin producing fruit. So, those first flowers that drop off the vines are not diseased, they're just early.

The easiest definition or description to differentiate between squashes and pumpkins is simple: all edible members of the genus *Cucurbita* may be considered squash. The round orange fruits used primarily for jack-o'-lanterns and pies are generally called pumpkins.

The majority of gourds are not considered edible and are used primarily for seasonal decoration. However, the colorful Turk's turban, thought to be a gourd by many folks, is edible.

Most of our squashes and pumpkins originated in Mexico and Central America and, as discovered by the Pilgrims, were a staple in the diet of North American Indians. The Andes Mountains of northern Argentina provided the source for most of the winter squashes we now enjoy.

Squashes and pumpkins generally have not been recommended for those who garden on a small scale because of the need for space. Of course, the use of trellises, walls or fences can provide space for a few vines when ground space is limited. However, more and more "bush-types" of squash and pumpkins are becoming favorites of small-space gardeners since they take up much less space and produce high quality fruit.

Vine types need 6 to 10 feet between rows and 2 to 5 feet between plants depending on the growth habit of the variety, soil fertility and whether or not the vines are pruned and trained. Bush types do best in rows 5 to 8 feet apart with plants 2 to 3 feet apart.

Squashes will grow best on good, well-drained loamy soils well-supplied with organic matter. Satisfactory yields can also be obtained on sandy and clay soils if managed properly through additions of organic matter and fertilizer. The soil should be slightly acidic (pH 6.5-6.8) for best results. Be sure to have the soil tested before planting.

Direct seeding about 1-inch deep is generally best, but plants can be started indoors in individual containers. Research has shown that vining plants tend to suffer less transplant shock when grown indoors in 6-inch containers, hardened off and then planted in the garden. When direct seeding, plant 4 to 6 seeds per hill, then thin to the strongest two seedlings when plants are 3 inches tall.

Follow the soil test recommendations for preplant applications of fertilizer. When runners are 12 to 18 inches long, apply 1/2 cup of 5-10-10 fertilizer in a band about 8 inches from the stem of each plant. Make a second application

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