

Growing Your Own

A beginner's guide to gardening

Winter Squash and Pumpkins

Winter squash and pumpkins are grown until their ripe fruit has a hard rind and mature seeds inside. It can be fun to harvest their fruits for decoration or store them to eat in the winter.

Varieties

Winter squash come in many varieties. They can take a lot of space to grow, so choose compact bush varieties if your garden is small. Vining varieties can also be grown over a trellis to make space.

Acorn squash is a small, round squash (one to three pounds) with green, orange, or even white skin and mild yellow-orange flesh inside. Good varieties to try include **Carnival** and **Honey Bear**.

Butternut squash is a medium-sized squash (three to five pounds) with yellow-tan skin and orangey flesh. It has a sweet, nutty pumpkin flavor and long body. Its solid vines make it very pest resistant. Varieties such as **Early Butternut** and **Honeynut** are good options to plant.

Cushaw squash is a large, meaty squash popular in Kentucky. It usually has green-and-white-striped skin and orange flesh. It can often weigh 10 to 20 pounds. Try either **Cushaw Green Stripe** or **Cushaw Orange Stripe**.

Delicata squash has long green-and-white-striped fruits with light-yellow flesh inside. You can roast and eat them skin and all. They taste sweet and delicate. Consider varieties such as **Bush Delicata** and **Jester**.

Spaghetti squash have yellow-ivory skin with light-yellow, stringy flesh inside. Their flavor is mild, and they are often used as a pasta substitute. Try varieties like **Pinnacle** or **Spaghetti**.



Honey Bear (acorn squash)
All-America Selections



Honeynut (mini butternut squash)
Johnny's Selected Seeds



Bush Delicata (delicata squash)
All-America Selections



Pinnacle (spaghetti squash)
Johnny's Selected Seeds



Baby Bear (pumpkin)
Johnny's Selected Seeds



Moonshine (pumpkin)
Johnny's Selected Seeds



Racer Plus (pumpkin)
Johnny's Selected Seeds

Pumpkins are winter squash with round, firm fruits in many colors, including orange. Most are grown for decoration, but you can also eat pie pumpkins. These varieties are recommended:

- **Baby Bear**
- **Big Autumn**
- **Cinnamon Girl**
- **Hijinks**
- **Moonshine**
- **Orange Smoothie**
- **Racer Plus**
- **Spooktacular**
- **Wee-B-Little**

How much to plant

You can harvest about 10 pounds of winter squash in 10 row feet. Plant two to three plants for a single person or a family to eat fresh. Plant more if you want to store them for winter eating.

How and when to plant

Squash are warm-season plants and won't grow in cold soil. In Kentucky, wait to plant them in the garden until at least late April or May (see Winter Squash Planting chart). Plant pumpkins for Halloween around mid-June.

Winter Squash Planting

Direct Seed Per Hill	1–2 seeds
Seed Depth	1 inch
Thin To	1 per hill

Hill Spacing

Squash (Bush)	4 feet apart
Squash (Vining)	6–8 feet apart
Pumpkins	8–12 feet apart

Safe Planting Dates

Eastern Kentucky	May 15–June 15
Central Kentucky	May 10–July 1
Western Kentucky	April 20–July 15

Vining winter squash need more room than bush types. Seeds should be planted one inch deep. Squash is often planted in hills with one or two seeds per hill. Soil can be mounded two to four inches high and about two feet across. Hills for bush-type winter squash can be four feet apart, but vining types need six to eight feet of space between hills. Pumpkin hills should be eight to 12 feet apart. Vining winter squash can also be grown around corn stalks or over a strong trellis or cattle panel arch to save space. To grow extra-large pumpkins, remove all but one or two fruits from a vine.

See the UK Cooperative Extension publication, [Home Vegetable Gardening in Kentucky \(ID-128\)](#) for more information.

Pests and diseases

Pests like winter squash as much as we do.

Cucumber beetles can eat young plants. A fine mesh covering over young plants may keep them out. You can buy insect netting or use tulle mesh from a fabric store. Drape fabric over simple wire arches or other poles to hold the netting over the plants. Secure fabric to the ground and leave in place until the plants are larger. Remove before they start blooming.

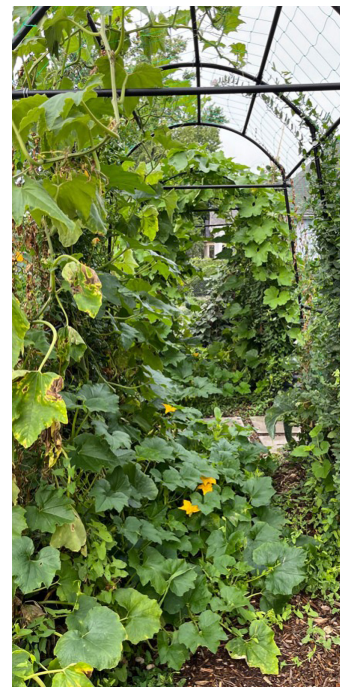
You should also watch for squash vine borers. Their white larvae burrow into vines and hurt the plants. Pick them off by hand. Or plant butternut squash, which have hard vines that are more resistant.

Watch for clusters of small, shiny, bronze squash bug eggs under leaves starting in June or July. This is the easiest stage to control squash bugs. Remove the eggs with your fingers or even with duct tape. If needed, just remove the leaf. The eggs hatch in one to two weeks. Once hatched, remove nymphs using a spray made with one teaspoon of soap in a gallon of water. For adults, you can handpick them and drop them into a bowl of soapy water or even remove them with a hand vacuum. Some plants can still grow and fruit if squash bug numbers remain low.



Mini pumpkins growing over an arch trellis

Erika Olsen, University of Kentucky



Tunnel trellis with luffa and pumpkins

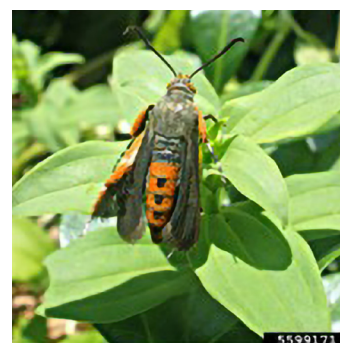
Erika Olsen, University of Kentucky



Squash vine borer larva removed from vine

Jim Jasinski, Ohio State University

Extension, Bugwood.org, CC BY-NC 3.0



Adult squash vine borer

Ansel Oommen, Bugwood.org, CC

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Cucumber beetles on pumpkin

Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org, CC BY-NC 3.0



Squash bug eggs under a leaf

Phil Sloderbeck, Kansas State University, Bugwood.org, CC BY-NC 3.0



Squash bug nymphs on a squash

Gerald Holmes, Strawberry Center, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, Bugwood.org, CC BY-NC 3.0



Adult squash bugs on a squash

Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org, CC BY-NC 3.0

Harvesting

Harvest winter squash when they are a deep, solid color. The skin should be a hard rind. If pressed in, your fingernail should leave a dent, not a cut. Cut the squash vine, leaving a two-inch stem. Handle winter squash carefully to not bruise or damage. Harvest before frost.

Put winter squash in a shaded, dry place for several weeks to cure. After that, they can be stored for many months in a cool place like a basement or garage. Acorn and delicata squash do not need to cure but can only keep for a month or so.



Harvesting squash

University of Kentucky CSA



Squash is ready to harvest when pressing your fingernail in the rind leaves a dent, not a cut (circled above).

Erika Olsen, University of Kentucky



Serving

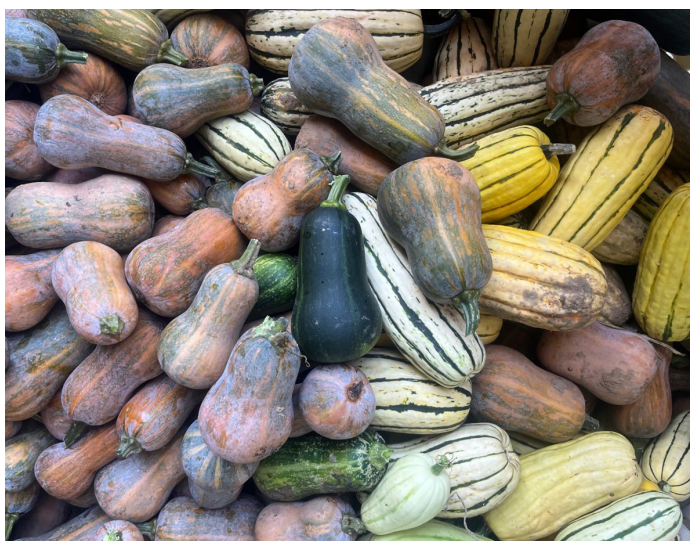
Winter squash is low in fat and sodium and an excellent source of vitamin A and fiber. You can peel or cut off the hard rind before cooking. Or you can remove the cooked flesh from the rind after cooking. You can steam, boil, roast, bake, or microwave it. Winter squash is delicious in baked desserts like pies, breads, and cookies. It is also used in stews, soups, pastas, and casseroles. Delicata squash is eaten skin and all, so there is no need to peel.

Storing

Once cured, winter squash can be stored in a cool place for up to six months. Acorn and delicata squash will only keep for about a month.

Clean up

After you finish harvesting, remove any remaining plants. Compost healthy plant material. Throw away any diseased plants.



Many varieties of winter squash ready to be cured
University of Kentucky CSA

Summary

Varieties

Winter squash come in many varieties. They can take a lot of space to grow, so choose compact bush varieties if your garden is small. Or grow vining varieties over a trellis to make space.

How much to plant

You can harvest about ten pounds of winter squash in ten row feet. Plant one to three plants for a single person or a family.

How and when to plant

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Pests and diseases

Cucumber beetles, squash vine borers, and squash bugs are the main pests for squash. Watch for pests and remove them when possible.

Harvesting

Harvest winter squash when they are a deep, solid color and skin is a hard rind. Harvest before frost. Cure most varieties for several weeks, then store or use.

Serving

Winter squash is low in fat and sodium and an excellent source of vitamin A and fiber. Steam it, boil it, roast it, bake it, or microwave it.

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