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TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

Easy Gardening

SQUASH • SQUASH • SQUASH • SQUASH • SQUASH

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Squash is a popular warm-season garden vegetable. Squash will grow well in all areas of Texas. Squash plants take up a lot of space, but because they are prolific producers it takes only a few plants to feed a family and all their neighbors.

Squash is one of the plants grown in the traditional Native American vegetable growing technique called the Three Sisters. The other two plants in the Three Sisters are beans and corn. Each plant had its role in this companion planting tradition. Corn served as a structure for the vining beans to grow up. Squash served as a ground cover to prevent weeds from growing. Beans provided natural fertilizer for all.

Yellow squash	Zucchini	Acorn
Burpee's Butterstick Dixie Early Prolific Early Summer Multipik	Ambassador Aristocrat Eight Ball Tigress El Dorado Goldfinger Gold Rush President Senator Sure Thing Tigress Zucchini Elite	Carnival Ebony Royal Table King Table Ace Table Queen
Scallop		**Butternut**
Early White Bush Patty Pan Peter Pan St. Patrick Starship Sunburst		Preclude II Waltham

Site selection

Like most vining vegetables, squash grows best in sandy, fertile soils with a pH between 6.0 and 6.5.

Soil preparation

Remove all rocks and trash from the soil. Work it up several weeks before planting, but only when the soil is dry enough not to stick to garden tools.

Squash grows best in soils that have

lots of organic matter. If possible, spread 2 to 3 inches of organic material such as compost, leaves, or rotted hay over the planting area. Then till to mix this organic material into the top 8 to 10 inches of soil.

Planting

Squash does not grow well in cool weather. Plant in the spring after all danger of frost has passed. For a good fall crop, plant early so squash will mature before the first killing frost.

Plant squash in hills 18 to 48 inches apart on rows 3 to 8 feet apart. The vining types, such as Hubbard or acorn, need more room than the bush types (Fig. 1.)

When seeding squash, plant five or six seeds about 1 inch deep in each hill (Fig. 2.) Water after planting the seed. After the seeds come up, thin them to three squash plants per hill (Fig. 3.)

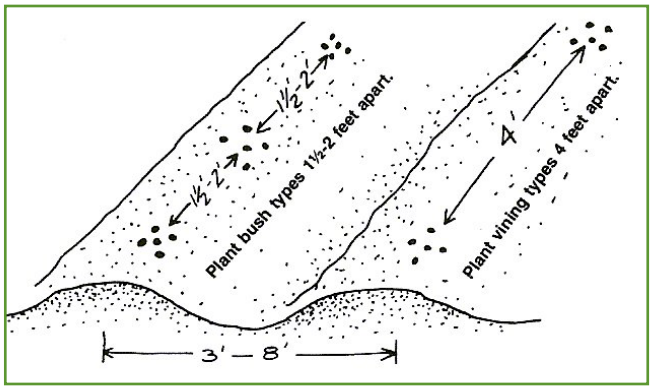


Figure 1. Plant squash on rows 3 to 8 feet apart.

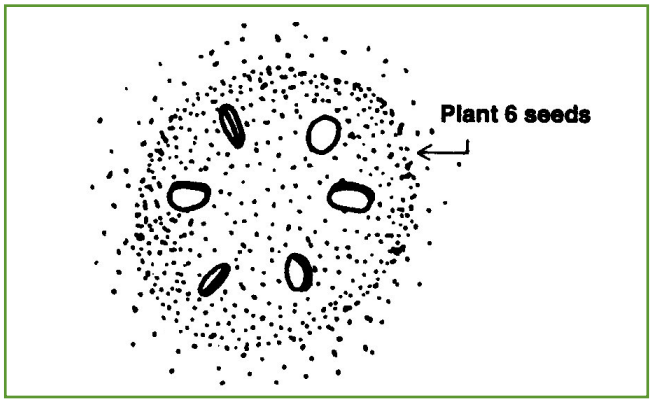


Figure 2. Plant five or six seeds in each hill.

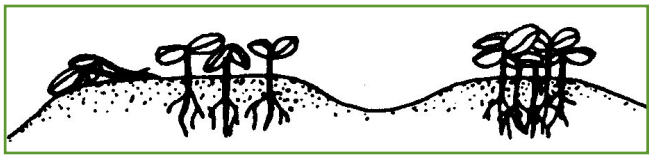


Figure 3. When plants are 3 to 4 inches tall, thin to three plants per hill.

Fertilizing

Add 2 to 3 pounds of fertilizer, such as 10-10-10, for each 100 square feet of garden area. If you plan to grow only a few plants, use 2 to 3 tablespoons of fertilizer for each hill. Scatter the fertilizer evenly over a 2-foot by 2-foot area. Work it into the top 3 to 4 inches of soil.

Watering

Water the plants enough to keep them from wilting. If the weather is really dry, squash plants should be watered at least once a week. Sandy soils need to be watered more often than heavy clay soils.

Care during the season

Keep squash plants free of weeds. Hoe around the plants to remove small weeds. When hoeing, be careful not to damage the roots (Fig. 4.) Hand pull the weeds close to the plants.

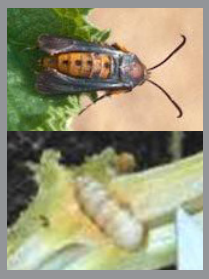
When the first blooms appear, place about 2 tablespoons of garden fertilizer around each hill. Do not let the fertilizer touch the plants. Water the plants after fertilizing.

Figure 4. Hoe carefully near squash plants so you will not hurt the roots. Hoe no deeper than 1 inch.

Diseases

Squash can get many diseases, especially when harvesting begins. Spray with an approved fungicide to help control most diseases. Ask your county Extension agent what fungicide to use, and follow all directions on the container.

Insects

Name and description		Control
 Squash vine borer	White larva about 1 inch long; usually found inside the stem near the ground; causes vines to wilt and die.	*Bt* for prevention, as larvae cannot be controlled once they are inside the stem
Squash bug	Large (½ to ¾ inch long); gray to brown; flat back.	Sevin® Thiodan®
Cucumber beetle	Cream colored larva ¾ inch long; adult ¼-inch-long beetle with yellow body and black spots or stripes.	pyrethrin rotenone

Harvesting

Harvest yellow and green (summer) squash when the fruit and seeds are small. Always harvest mature squash so the plants will keep producing. Harvest winter (hard rind) squash when they are full sized, the skin is hard, and the bottom of the fruit is cream to orange colored. A light frost will not damage fruits of winter squash. Squash is best when cut, not pulled, from the vine.

Serving

Fresh squash adds color and variety to meals. Green and yellow squash are fair sources of Vitamins A and C. Winter squash is a good source of Vitamin A and has fair amounts of Vitamin C. Squash can be served in many ways from fried dishes to casseroles. Winter squash is often baked. Cook all types of squash only until tender to keep the vitamin content.

Storing

Green and yellow squash can be stored in the refrigerator for about a week. Winter squash can be stored for several months.

Cleanup

Old squash vines should be added to the compost pile or worked into the soil well before the spring planting season.

Acknowledgments

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