



Cucurbits

DID YOU KNOW?

The largest fruits in the plant kingdom are pumpkins. The biggest pumpkin ever grown weighed 606.7 kilograms (about 1,338 lb)!



ORIGINS

Most of the cucurbits are native to the Americas. They were among the first plants to be domesticated in the New World.



Squash is one of the three sisters (corn, beans, and squash) in the Native American cropping system.

CLASSIFYING CUCURBITS

FAMILY
Cucurbitaceae

There are about 800 species in this family.



GENUS
Cucurbita

In Latin, this means "gourd."



There are 14 species in this genus.

SPECIES

Scientists have grouped cucurbits into different species based on differences in the structure of the flowers and other plant parts. Three species commonly grown in gardens are:

Cucurbita maxima big max pumpkin

hubbard squash



Cucurbita moshata butternut squash



Cucurbita pepo



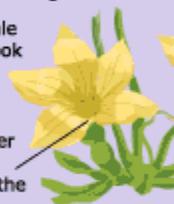
CUCURBIT PLANTS

Summer squash, such as zucchini and yellow squash, grows like a bush. Winter squashes and pumpkins have long vines.



Cucurbit plants have large leaves.

On a single plant, male and female flowers look like large, yellow, flaring funnels.



The female flower has a swelling, which becomes the fruit.

USES

Summer squash can be eaten—ripe and flesh. Winter squashes must be cooked. They are usually baked or steamed. You can also use them in pies, cakes, cookies, and casseroles.



You can use winter squashes and pumpkins in a dry place for use.

GROWING AND HARVESTING CUCURBITS

Cucurbits are warm-season crops. Plant in full sun at least one week after the last frost date. Summer squash can grow close together, but the vines of pumpkins and winter squash need more space to grow. Add lots of organic matter to the soil. Cucurbits have deep roots and need lots of water, so water deeply and slowly.

I pick summer squashes when their fruits are young, small, and tender. Pumpkins and winter squash won't be ready until later in the fall when they have a hard shell.



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