



BEYOND CROOKNECK SQUASH

Summer squash, fried with onions in a cast-iron pan, is one of my favorite Southern dishes. Seems like it's practically mandatory, if you plant a garden in the South, to grow crookneck yellow squash or green zucchini—they're tried-and-true, easy to grow and tasty to eat. But with all the hybrid and heirloom summer-squash varieties out there, why not try something new?

Many years ago, a horticulture colleague shared this rule of thumb about choosing seeds: Stick with 80 percent tried-and-true varieties, and experiment with 20 percent new and unusual plants. Trying that with summer squash can lead to delicious discoveries!

Squash are grouped into either summer or winter types. Winter squash, such as spaghetti, acorn and butternut squash, are grown while temperatures are warm but typically are harvested in early fall. They have higher sugar contents than summer squash. With their hard outer shells and dense, sweet flesh, these squash are perfect for storing and eating well into winter.

Summer squash (*Cucurbita pepo*) grow best when temperatures are between 65 and 75 degrees Fahrenheit. Yellow straightneck, crookneck and green zucchini are all varieties of the same plant with different fruit shapes, sizes and growth habits. They're ready for harvest when they are young and tender, while your fingernail can pierce the thin, edible skin. Eat them raw or cooked, but quickly; their shelf life lasts only about a week before fruit quality begins to decline.

Among the varieties of summer squash, you may have seen a rounded, scallop-edged squash that resembles a flying saucer. That's pattypan squash—sometimes called scaloppini or sunburst squash. These whimsically shaped squash are often served scooped out and stuffed with garlic,

Squash seed-planting times

FOR LATE-SPRING/SUMMER HARVEST

Lowcountry	March 20–April 10
Midlands	April 1–20
Upstate	April 15–May 15

FOR LATE-SUMMER HARVEST

Lowcountry	August 10–25
Midlands	August 1–15
Upstate	July 1–20



D. LEONIS

- ▲ Pattypan varieties grow on bush-type plants.
- ▶ Tromboncino squash grows on vines, and the fruit is straighter when it has room to hang.

breadcrumbs and onions. Some varieties to look for include Flying Saucer, Sunburst, Peter Pan and G-Star. Pattypan squash grow on bush-type plants and can be harvested at any size.



Round, ball-shaped varieties of green zucchini are another squash well suited for stuffing and are considered a gourmet treat. The hybrid varieties Eight Ball and Black Ball have dark-green skin and mature quickly, within 45–50 days after planting. One Ball is a round zucchini with bright-yellow skin. Other yellow-skinned zucchini with a more traditional squash shape include Goldmine, which has white stripes along the cylindrical fruit.



The exotically named Cocozelle, or Cocozella di Napoli, are open-pollinated, heirloom Italian zucchini characterized by dark-green skins and white or light-green ribs and prized by chefs for their delicious flavor. Harvest these tender squash early and often to keep them producing fruit longer.



Tromboncino (*Cucurbita moschata*) are trumpet-shaped squash more closely related to winter squash but harvested as summer squash. Similar in flavor to zucchini, this Italian heirloom grows on vigorously climbing vines. When harvested young, it has a sweet, tender flavor. Left on the vine, tromboncino squash develop hard skins that ▶▶



JOAN McDONALD

Battling blossom-end rot

Just like tomatoes, squash can get blossom-end rot, a dark-brown or black rot that occurs near the end of the fruit. Blossom-end rot is caused by a lack of calcium available to the plant while the fruit are forming. This can be caused by a deficit of calcium in the soil and exacerbated by dry periods or irregular irrigation.



TO COMBAT BLOSSOM-END ROT:

- Test garden soil regularly, and apply lime only if recommended.
- Mulch vegetables with 2 to 3 inches of organic materials, such as grass clippings, pine straw or leaves, to prevent soil from drying out.
- Don't overfertilize plants with nitrogen or potash (potassium). Excessive amounts of these nutrients depress the uptake of calcium.
- Irrigate squash plants during long dry periods.
- Improve soil by adding organic matter, such as good-quality compost. Compost improves soil structure, drainage and water-holding capacity. Adding organic matter helps increase plant uptake of water and calcium. Plus, all the critters in good, healthy soil help combat diseases and insects naturally.

Cooking with squash

If you've got summer squash, we've got recipes. Check out ideas for transforming your squash and zucchini into delicious pies, soups, pasta and more at SCLiving.coop/food/recipes.



ZUCCHINI LASAGNA Everything you love about lasagna is in this hearty dish, minus the carb-laden pasta noodles.



GRILLED VEGETABLE SKEWERS When the grill is hot, put a char on your squash, zucchini and other favorite vegetables threaded on a wooden skewer.



SUMMER RIBBON PASTA Toss thin strips of sautéed squash and other vegetables with fettuccine for a garden-fresh summer supper.



SQUASH PEPPER CASSEROLE Start with a classic Southern combo of yellow squash and Vidalia onions, then mix in more veggies, rice and just the right seasonings.



VEGETABLE CASSEROLE Layer a rainbow of vegetables to bake up as a summer side dish.



SUMMER-FRESH YELLOW SQUASH SOUP Seasoned with basil, cumin and lemon pepper, this broth-based soup makes for a light and healthy meal.



TRACIE'S SQUASH PIES These pies are a sweet surprise with just a hint of flaked coconut.



BANANA-ZUCCHINI NUT BREAD Moist and flavorful, this versatile quick bread is delicious at breakfast, dinner or snack time.



ZUCCHINI PARMESAN Thick slices of zucchini star in this vegetarian version of an Italian classic.

TOP ROW, FROM LEFT: MICHAEL PHILLIPS; BELINDA SMITH-SULLIVAN; GINA MOORE; JONATHAN SLOANE. BOTTOM ROW: LEEANN WHITE; INA PETERS; SANYI KUMAR; WILLIAM P. EDWARDS; ELZBIETA SEKOWSKA

allow them to be stored a bit longer.

Cucuzza squash (*Lagenaria siceraria*) is another popular Italian hybrid. The pale-green fruit resemble long, skinny baseball bats growing on a vine. Typically, they are harvested for eating when they are less than 3 inches in diameter and between 15 inches and 3 feet long. Botanically, cucuzza is really a gourd. Unlike other summer squashes, its skin is too tough to eat, and it's best eaten cooked. You might hear cucuzza called "googootz," a slang term that can mean any zucchini squash or a term of endearment for a loved one. No matter what you call it, eat it stuffed, like a true Sicilian, for a tasty summer supper.



When planting, follow soil-test recommendations for fertilization rates. Avoid applying too much nitrogen; this can lead to vigorous growth with few flowers.

Don't fret if the first flowers on



DIANE VETTO BARHAM

Cucuzza squash is really a gourd, and the skin is too tough to eat, but it's a great choice for stuffing.

your squash don't produce any fruit; they can't, because they are male, pollen-producing flowers. All squashes produce both male and female flowers

on the same plant. After a few days, female, fruit-producing flowers emerge, and tiny squash fruit will follow.

Pollinators are critical for good fruit production. Honeybees and squash bees, a native pollinator, do the lion's share of the work. Misshapen fruit are a sign of poor pollination. To attract a variety of pollinators, try planting zinnias, cosmos and other pollinator-friendly flowers nearby.

If you grow tired of eating the fruit of your summer squash, try eating the flowers. The edible flowers are delicious stuffed with cheese, fried or simply chopped over pasta. Harvest squash blossoms first thing in the morning before they are fully opened. No matter how you eat them, summer squash are versatile, diverse and delicious! 🍽️

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