

Horticulture Notes

Harvesting and Post-Harvest Care of Summer Squash

Pick summer squash when they are shiny, young and tender (as immature fruit). This generally requires harvesting every other day. Under exceptional growing conditions, plants may need to be harvested daily. Care should be taken to prevent cuts and bruises to fruit. The skin of the young squash fruit is easily damaged. It is best to cut fruit from plants rather than pulling or twisting it.

The first squash harvested from a planting are generally the best quality. Plan to harvest any given planting for only 2 to 3 weeks and then start harvesting from another planting. Fruit quality decreases as the planting ages. This ensures that the fruit you are harvesting will be of the highest quality. A good yield of summer squash is 300 cwt./acre. The following information is the approximate number of days from pollination to market maturity for several types of summer squash under warm growing conditions.

Type of squash	Time to Market Maturity (days)
Crookneck	6-7*
Straightneck	5-6*
Zucchini	3-4*

*for a weight of 0.25 to 0.5 lb. per fruit

Summer squash is quite perishable. Its skin is tender and easily wounded in handling. Normally fruit should not be stored except to accommodate normal delays such as holidays and weekends. Fruit can be held 1 to 2 days below 41°F with no discernible damage, but prolonged storage should be avoided as summer squash are chilling sensitive (damaged by exposure to low temperatures). Holding summer squash longer than 4 days at 32°F will cause chilling damage (surface browning, pitting) and rapid deterioration of the fruit. The recommended storage temperature range is 41°F to 50°F with 95 percent relative humidity. The storage life is only 1 to 2 weeks.



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For more information, call your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find the number.

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