

Horticulture Notes

Harvesting, Curing, and Post-Harvest Care of Pumpkins and Winter Squash

Even after they have matured and are removed from the vine, pumpkin and winter squash are still alive. The objective of curing and storing them is to prolong the post-harvest life of the fruit. Mature pumpkins and winter squash store better than immature fruit. When mature, winter squashes such as Butternut, Acorn, and Hubbard types have hard skins that resist puncture from your thumbnail. Skins of winter squash appear dull and dry compared to the fresh, bright sheen of the skins of immature fruit. Be sure to leave a long stem (handle) on pumpkins, but on winter squashes such as the Hubbard types, be sure to remove the stems completely.

Keep in mind that dead vines do not indicate maturity in pumpkin and winter squash. When vines die prematurely from disease or drought, for example, the fruits are probably immature and therefore will not store successfully.

Curing involves elevating storage temperatures to 80 to 85 degrees F with 75 to 80 percent relative humidity for approximately 10 days. Curing heals wounds, helps ripen immature fruit, enhances color, and ensures a longer post-harvest life. After curing, reduce the temperature and relative humidity as indicated in the table below. Curing is beneficial to pumpkins and some winter squash, but Butternut, Hubbard, and Quality squashes have not shown any added benefits from curing. Curing is detrimental to Acorn types such as the variety Table Queen.

All pumpkins and winter squash should be well matured and free from injury and decay when stored. They should be kept dry and provided with good air circulation. Control the humidity since high humidities will promote decay and lower humidities will cause excessive weight loss. When winter squashes are taken out of storage, they should be marketed immediately.

Type	Approximate Length of Storage	Temperature Conditions	Relative Humidity	Remarks
Pumpkins	2 to 3 months	50 to 55°F	50 to 75%	Should be well matured
Winter Squash Hubbards	5 to 6 months	50 to 55°F	70 to 75%	Holds well in storage
Acorn	5 to 8 weeks	50°F	50 to 75%	Develops poor color at higher temperatures
Butternut, Turban, and Buttercup	2 to 3 months	50°F	50 to 75%	



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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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