

Pumpkins and Winter Squash

Early fall planting will last from July to September.

If you're considering winter squash or pumpkins for your home garden, the first decision you'll need to make is whether or not there's enough room. Neither fits well into the average size urban garden because the plants become too large. However, if your decision is to plant, then you've selected an easy to grow crop that fairs well in a variety of soils.

Plant in late spring or early fall...

Although they're known as winter squash, this type of hard skin squash, along with pumpkins, can be planted either in late Spring or early Fall. Those planted in the Spring need to be used several weeks after picking because the quality deteriorates more quickly than those grown in the Fall. The late Spring planting date runs the entire month of April, while the early Fall date lasts from July to September, depending on the length of maturity time needed for the variety selected.

Recommended varieties...

The pumpkin varieties recommended by the Georgia Extension Service are: *Howden, Autumn Gold, Spirit, Funny Face, Jackpot, Small Sugar* and the fine quality cushaw pumpkins. For miniature pumpkins, select *Jack-be-Little* or *Munchkin* varieties.

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Soil preferences...

Pumpkins and winter squash prefer loose, well-drained organic soil, however, they fare well in almost any soil that is re-worked with compost and fertilizer. For sandy or clayish soil, dig the beds to the depth of your shovel blade, break up all clumps of dirt and mix four inches of compost into the soil.

Spacing requirements...

Spacing between hills and rows will depend on the type of plant selected. Bush varieties are popular for smaller gardens because they require less space than vine plants. Three feet is the number to remember when you're planting bush varieties. Allow three feet between rows and plant

two or three seed in hills spaced three feet apart. Add a handful of 8-8-8 fertilizer for every 10 feet of row.

For vine plants, use beds six feet wide, plant 2 or 3 seed in hills four feet apart and use a cup or handful of 8-8-8 fertilizer for every 10 feet of row. Side-dress with the same fertilizer when the bush plants reach a foot in height and when the vine variety lays down and begins to run.

Although pumpkins and winter squash can be harvested while tender and cooked like summer squash, it's best if they're allowed to mature to a tough skin on the vine. A harder skin will allow the fruit to store better.

For more information on pumpkins and winter squash contact your local county Extension office.