

SUMMER SQUASH

Patty Pan Squash

Cucurbita pepo

Cucurbitaceae

ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

Description

Colombia and Mexico are believed to be the countries of origin. Summer Squashes are distinctive from all other squashes because they are eaten when they are immature. They grow on either vines or bushes with large leaves that are hairy underneath. They have smooth, edible skin, flesh that varies from light to dark green or orange and seeds that are soft and edible. Summer Squashes are consistent producers of a crop that has a great variety of shapes, colors and sizes. These vegetables are primarily grown as food for humans but can be fed to livestock as fodder.

Cultivation

Seeds should be planted 1 in deep in well-drained, rich soil when air temperature has reached 20° - 30° C (68° - 87° F) and night temperatures no lower than 18° C (65° F). Soils with pH of 5.6 - 6.8 are preferred as well as all-day sun with good air circulation and high humidity. Many diseases are associated with wet leaves, wet stems and waterlogged soils. Mulch, especially black plastic will deter weeds, increase soil temperature early in the season and conserve moisture. Though Summer Squashes have been grown at an elevation of 2200 m (7180 ft) in Mexico, they are more common at lower elevations at warm temperatures.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Two to three months after planting from seed the blossoms fall off, Summer Squashes are 17-20 cm (7-8 in) in length and ready to harvest. Care needs to be taken as the rind will be tender, puncturing easily with a fingernail. Harvesting every 2-3 days will keep the plant in production. If saving seeds, Summer Squash can be left on the stems longer, then picked and cured in a cool (50%) humidity area for 4 days. The seeds may then be separated from the attached flesh by mashing up the whole vegetable and soaking everything in water where the seeds will sink to the bottom. Seeds should be dried thoroughly in a warm, well-ventilated spot until they are brittle enough to snap. Cucurbita seeds can be stored in a dark, cool place in an airtight container for up to 10 years.

Pests and Diseases

Plants in the Cucurbita family are susceptible to 48+ diseases caused by fungus, bacteria and viruses as well as numerous pests. Precautions should be: use of genetically resistant varieties, deep digging of the soil before planting, placing plants 1 m - 1.25 m (3 ft - 4 ft) apart, use of black plastic mulch, covering the plants with a fine mesh cloth until blossoms appear, picking off and killing larvae and eggs and prompt removal of any infested plants. Do not plant Cucurbit crops in the same field year after year as many of the harmful organisms spend part of their live span below ground..

Cooking and Nutrition

The flowers, young stems, seeds and roots of some varieties are eaten, cooked and raw . Oil and protein-rich seeds are roasted and ground into meal. Dark flesh of any squash variety is high in vitamin A, beta-carotene.