

TROPICAL PUMPKIN

Calabaza, Winter Squash

Cucurbita moschata

Cucurbitaceae – Gourd

ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

Origin

The Tropical Pumpkin originated in tropical South or Central America, possibly Peru or Mexico, and is now widely distributed throughout the tropics.

Uses

Tropical Pumpkins are eaten in a variety of ways—raw, boiled, fried, baked, mashed, steamed, stuff, dried, or used in pies. Young fruits can be pickled, and the seeds are eaten raw or roasted. The flowers, leaves, and young stems are eaten as a green vegetable or added to soup.

Cultivation

Plant seeds 1-2 cm (0.5-1 in) deep, 3-4 seeds per hill. Space hills approximately 1.5-2.0 m (4.5-6 ft) apart. In most soil situations, the vines need to be fertilized only at planting time. Tropical Pumpkins have been successfully interplanted with avocado and grapefruit. The vines will grow widely spreading along the surface of the ground, rooting at nodes, or they may be grown on trellises or other supports. They have a strong tendency to climb on upright objects, clambering over other plants, or growing up tree trunks and limbs. Leaves on older fruiting branches die back but younger branches will continue the growth of the plant. The separate male and female yellow flowers produce nectar at maturity; attracting honeybee pollinators.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Usually a color change in the fruit indicates maturity. As cross-pollination is common, for pure seed production plants of different varieties must be isolated by 0.8 km (1/2 mile), or plants must be hand-pollinated following standard cucurbit seed production techniques. .

Pests and Diseases

Tropical Pumpkins are resistant to many of the diseases and insects that plague other pumpkins and squashes in hot, humid weather.

Cooking and Nutrition

Whole Tropical Pumpkins have been roasted in burning coals of wood fires. A recommended cooking method is oven baking cut open fruits, from which seeds have been removed and butter and brown sugar has been added. Some chefs add only butter with salt and pepper before baking. Tropical Pumpkin fruits can be saved by cutting them into strips and drying them. The dried Tropical Pumpkin is later ground into a meal for baking bread. Young green fruits, from which the flowers have just fallen, may be cooked, mashed, seasoned, and eaten as a vegetable. Male flowers also may be eaten; they are dipped in batter and fried.