

# Cucumbers, Squash, Pumpkins and Gourds



## Nutritional Components of Cucumbers and Squash

Carbohydrates  
Water  
Protein  
The mineral potassium  
Vitamins A, C, K, B6 (pyridoxine), and B9 (folate)

**Cucumbers** and squash, along with pumpkins and gourds are members of the **Cucurbitaceae** family.

Hundreds of cucumbers are grown at Oak Forest each year. Cucumbers grow on a vine with large leaves that shade the fruit as they grow. The vine will spread over quite a large area on the ground or climb a trellis. We have found that letting cucumber vines climb one of the fences in the garden gives us the best results. We plant seeds in late March or early April and are able to pick many cucumbers before school is out in June. They need lots of water.

Cucumbers grow very quickly and because of this rapid growth need lots of food. When they are planted they are given lots of compost and organic matter. As they grow, side dressings of organic fertilizer every four weeks or an application of liquid fertilizer will give them a much needed boost. If watered well and fed periodically, plants can last the entire summer.

Cucumber vines eventually produce flowers. A female flower is pollinated by an insect that has just visited a male flower to collect pollen. Then the female flower starts to produce the cucumber at its base. Because bees are the most important pollinators for cucumbers, any decrease in the population of bees results in fewer fruits.

There are many varieties of cucumbers. The bush variety, although still a vine, takes less room than the standard cucumbers. We grow "burp less", Asian, and Armenian varieties. A small type of cucumber is grown for pickling.

Since cucumbers contain a lot of water, they are refreshing eaten cold on a hot day. They also have lots of vitamins and other healthful nutrients. Many of these are in the skin, which should be left unpeeled for eating.

**Squash:** There are two basic types of squash: winter squash and summer squash. We grow several varieties of summer squash in our garden. These are planted in April and usually produce squash by the time school lets out. Sometimes we can harvest squash all summer. The plants like fertilizer, compost, sun, and lots of water. Some of the summer types that are grown at Oak Forest include yellow straight neck and crookneck, zucchini, patty pan, and eight ball. These have soft skins and don't store for long periods of time. They should be eaten quickly.



Winter squashes do not grow as well here, which is why we typically do not plant them in the garden. They do have hard skins and keep for long periods of time. Some of them can grow very large, up to 1000 pounds! Hubbard, acorn, spaghetti, and butternut are some of the popular winter squashes. Some are used to make delicious pies!

Plant all squashes at the proper time of the year. (Use the planting guide.) Plant them where they will get full sun. Good loose soil enriched with organic matter is important. We mulch around the plants after the seeds germinate to keep weeds down and moisture in the soil. Fertilize the vines often with organic fertilizer. Keep them well watered especially if there is not much rain.

**Pests:** All these plants can get a number of pests and diseases. The four you should look for in the garden are powdery mildew disease, squash bugs, squash vine borers, and cucumber beetles. There are organic ways to treat these pests and it is not really necessary to use chemical poisons to kill them. Use suggested web sites to research these pests and find a reasonable ways to treat them. For many of these pests hand removal is as effective as any other method. Healthy soil and the proper amount of water will keep your plants from becoming stressed and attracting these pests.

# Cucumbers, Squash, Pumpkins and Gourds, continued

**Harvest:** For a good harvest of cucumbers or squash these plants should be picked daily. The more you harvest the more the plants will produce. If you let some of the fruit grow too large, the seeds will mature inside. Those mature seeds tell the plant to cut back on production or die. **Pick cucumbers and squash every other day; don't let them get too big!** Compost any rotten ones.

**How often should you check and pick your cucumbers/squash?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Pumpkins:** Large pumpkins are not grown at Oak Forest since they are very big plants and would soon cover the whole garden. You will plant pumpkin seeds in a small pot in March of next year. We always take the seeds from a Halloween pumpkin, let them dry in the shed, and then plant them. They will germinate about 2 weeks after planting. In about two more weeks you may take your pumpkin plant home to plant wherever you wish.

<b>Nutritional Components of Pumpkins</b> Carbohydrates Water The mineral potassium Vitamins A, C, E, B5 (pantothenic acid), B6 (pyridoxine), and B9 (folate)
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**Do you like Pumpkin Pie?** \_\_\_\_\_



**World Record Pumpkin Pie  
Baked in New Bremen, Ohio  
3,699 Pounds**

**Gourds:** Most gourds are not edible. Most gourds are used in many ornamental ways, or as containers. After a gourd is picked it must be hung up inside to dry. There are hundreds of different types of gourds. Cucuzza is a gourd that is edible. We often grow it on the arbor in the Annex garden. It grows long fruits which can be used in cooking as you would use a summer type of squash. They are often used in Italian cooking.

**Harvest:** It's best to leave pumpkins and gourds on the vine as long as possible to ensure that they are fully mature. Mature fruits will be fully colored. Thump them to see if they have a hollow sound inside. Try denting the rind with your fingernail; a mature pumpkin or winter squash may dent, but it will not puncture easily. The foliage should be starting to turn yellow and decline. The stems should be hard or starting to crack or turn brown. The exception is the Cucuzza. It should be picked when they are about 12" long.

**What do all plants in the Cucurbitaceae family have in common?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What fertilizer would you use on these plants?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Where would you find a squash vine borer?**  
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**Where would you find out how to treat a pest problem of one of these plants?**  
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