Vegetable

Yellow Squash

Grow

Yellow squash is a type of summer, soft shell squash. It is a fruit biologically because it has seeds and grows from flowering plants. Yellow squash is considered a vegetable in the culinary or nutrition world because of the nutrients it provides. There are different types of squash that grow in winter and summer. Winter squash grows on vines and has a hard skin. Summer squash can grow on vines or bush variety plants. Summer squash includes yellow and green varieties. Yellow squash can be Crookneck or Straightneck. Other types of summer squash are: Opo, Pattypan, Scallopini, Sunburst and Zucchini.

Quickly Grown

Yellow squash tends to grow in a temperate climate with a well-drained, loamy soil. Summer squash prefers full sun. It can be planted in one of two ways: from seedlings or seeds. Start seeds indoors in peat pots 2-4 weeks before the last frost. Seedlings grow very quickly and will start producing squash in about 8 weeks. Seedlings can be transplanted after the last frost until midsummer. If planting seeds directly in the garden, place 1 inch deep and 2 feet apart.

Worldwide, the largest producers of squash are the United States (U.S.), China, India, and Russia. In the U.S., California, Florida, Georgia, and New York are the top squash growing states.[1-3]

Fun Fact: Yellow squash is also known as "Crookneck Squash" because of its distinctive crooked neck.[1-3]

Choose

Some produce, like yellow squash, are harvested when still immature. Yellow squash should be picked when 4-7 inches with tender skin and the seeds are immature. The skin should be firm and free of cuts and bruises. If the rind is too hard to be dented by a thumbnail, it will not be good to eat. Do not choose pitted, dull or spotted squash. Pitting occurs due to chilling damage from being brought up to room temperature after cold storage.[1-4]

Store

Squash should be used quickly

Store squash in the refrigerator at 45-50°F and 85-95% relative humidity. Make sure it is well-ventilated. Store away from ethylene-producers such as apples, pears and tomatoes. Once harvested, yellow squash will only last briefly so it is important to use soon, within a week to 10 days. Do not wash until you are ready to use it. Cooked squash can be stored in the refrigerator up to 2 days.[3-4]

Fun Fact: The skin of yellow squash appears rough, but the bumps are smooth in texture.[1-3]

Use

Many ways to eat squash

The skin, flesh and seeds of summer squash can be eaten raw or cooked. Before cooking or eating, wash squash under clean, running water. Try to leave the skin on for the most nutrients. Raw yellow squash can be added to salads or paired with other vegetables and hummus, low fat dressing or salsa. There are a number of ways to cook squash—boil, steam, sauté, stir fry, bake, roast, grill or dry it. Boiling is not usually recommended because of the tendency of the squash to become watery and lose much of its flavor and texture. If you do chose to boil squash, be sure to use as little water as possible and cook until just tender. The best way to preserve squash is to freeze it.[1-4]

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Teach

Domestication of summer squash originated in Mexico and Central America. Scientists have found squash seeds preserved in Mexican caves dating back more than 10,000 years. Summer squash were one of the foods Columbus brought back from North America. Portuguese and Spanish explorers then introduced squashes to many parts of the world.[1-2]

Fun Fact: Native Americans often referred to squash as one of the "three sisters" along with corn and beans.[5-7]

Classroom Activity

Materials Needed:

- *In the Three Sisters Garden* by JoAnne Dennee

Steps:

1. Read and discuss the book. Ask students to share how squash, corn, and beans are eaten in their family.
2. Have students research and prepare traditional Native American recipes using squash, corn and/or beans. The Oneida Indian Nation Health Department created a Three Sisters Cookbook as a community health project. Check out www.oneidaindiannation.com/culture/threesisters/cookbook.

Fun Fact: Squash plants require bees for pollination.[1]

Classroom Activity

Materials Needed:

- Large container with holes or gravel in the bottom
- Potting mix
- Squash, corn, and bean seeds

Steps:

1. Place potting mix in the container.
2. Plant 3 corn seeds, 2 bean seeds and 1 squash seed. (Corn provides support, beans supply nitrogen, and squash shades out weeds.)
3. Place container in a location with 6 hours of sunlight or 12 hours of grow lights.
4. Have students observe, measure growth and record.
5. Plant seeds in a school garden, if an option.[1-2,5-7]

Eat

Delicious and Nutritious

Yellow squash is very low in calories compared to other foods. For sliced squash, one cup raw has about 24 calories and ½ cup cooked has about 21 calories. Yellow squash is free of cholesterol and low in fat and sodium. It is a good source of vitamin C and manganese. Cooked yellow squash has ten times more vitamin A per serving. Yellow squash is also a source of potassium.

Vitamin C helps form collagen to hold muscles, bones and tissues together, protects us from infection and bruising, aids in healing, keeps our gums healthy, helps our body absorb iron and folate from plants, and acts as an antioxidant to prevent cell damage. Manganese helps with forming bone and converting carbohydrate, protein and fat into energy. Vitamin A promotes normal vision, supports the growth and health of cells and tissues, protects us from infection and helps regulate the immune system. Potassium helps maintain normal blood pressure, regulate fluids and mineral balance, transmit nerve signals and contract muscles. The phytochemical lutein in yellow squash helps with maintaining normal vision.[4,8-9]

Fun Fact: "Squash" comes from the Narragansett Native American word *askutasquash*, which means "eaten raw or uncooked."[10]

Find

For more yellow squash facts and resources, visit:

1. North Carolina State Extension, www.ces.ncsu.edu
2. California Harvest of the Month, http://harvestofthemonth.cdph.ca.gov
3. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, www.fns.usda.gov
4. Fruits & Veggies More Matters, www.fruitsveggiesmorematters.org
5. Oregon Department of Education, www.ode.state.or.us
6. Kids Gardening, www.kidsgardening.org
7. Cornell University, http://blogs.cornell.edu/garden/get-activities/signature-projects/the-three-sisters-exploring-an-iroquois-garden
8. USDA Food Composition Databases, http://ndb.nal.usda.gov
9. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, www.eatright.org
10. Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/rr/scitech/mysteries/squash.html