

GROWING CUCUMBERS, MELONS, AND SQUASH

Plant pumpkins, melons, and squash outdoors after May 25 when danger of frost is past. To use transplants, you can purchase them at a garden center or start seeds indoors about 4 weeks before the intended outdoor planting date. However, plants seeded directly in the garden will soon catch up with transplants.

Cucurbits do best in well-drained soil in full sun. Mulching with black plastic will encourage faster growth and earlier fruit set. These plants require a lot of moisture in the summer, but the foliage should be kept dry. They are often damaged by an early frost and melons in particular may require some protection in the fall. Most cucurbits take a lot of space in the garden although new bush varieties are more space efficient. Avoid overcrowding because this predisposes the plants to diseases. As Cucurbits are prone to several fatal wilt diseases, grow disease resistant varieties whenever possible.

Several cucumber varieties do well in southeast Michigan. White spine cucumbers turn creamy white as they mature; black spine varieties turn yellowish orange. The spines are miniature stickers that protrude from the warts when the fruit are young. Harvest all types before they reach an over-mature stage. Most slicing or fresh-eating cucumbers are picked when they are 7 to 8 inches long.

Good cantaloupe or muskmelon varieties for this area include: Saticoy Hybrid, Ambrosia, Gold Star and Burpee's Hybrid (also known as Howell melon). Good watermelons include Summer Festival and Crimson Sweet. A bush watermelon to try is Burpee's Sugar Bush. Other melons include the green Honey Dew and Honey Drip.

Summer squash, many of which are now bush varieties, are fast maturing vegetables that do not store for a long period. Harvest them in mid-summer when they are 6 to 8 inches long. Plants will keep producing new squash if they are kept picked. Varieties include the Yellow Gold Rush Hybrid, Green Zucchini Elite and White Patty Pan.

Winter squash take much long to mature. If picked after a light frost, but before a severe frost, winter squash may be stored for several months at cool temperatures. Bush varieties include: Burpee's Butter Boy (a butternut type), Bush Acorn Table King and Burpee's Bush Table Queen.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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