

Butternut Squash by Helene Haluska

Botanical name: *Cucurbita moschata*

Family name: Cucurbitaceae

I've been growing butternut squash for over 30 years in my home garden because of its ease of growing, relatively high productivity, and long storage life. This year I'm growing the variety Early Butternut Hybrid, which produces fruit on average 85 days from planting. It does spread a lot, so you do need a significant amount of space in your garden to grow this variety. There are more compact varieties which don't spread as much, but they generally don't produce as many fruits. I am growing the squash partially on a trellis to save some space and to get it off the ground to reduce fungus and possible insect pests.



This squash, like other squashes, is a warm season vegetable which should be planted in the spring once temperatures reach 65 to 75 degrees and there is no danger of frost. The plants need a sunny site with well-drained, medium rich soil having a pH of 6.0-7.5. They can be planted in a group of 2-3 plants with the groups 4 to 6 feet apart. The plants need a minimum of an inch of water a week as they grow, possibly more when temperatures are consistently above 90 degrees. Like other squash, butternut squash have male and female flowers on the same plant and need insects, primarily bees, for pollination. Each plant will produce numerous 10 to 12- inch fruits, which should be allowed to mature on the vine until they develop a hard shell that can't be dented by a fingernail. The fruit can be stored for two to six months at a temperature of 45 to 55 degrees with low humidity. I store my squash in a large crawlspace under our house, and they last through much of the winter.

Like other squashes, butternut varieties are susceptible to some diseases and insect pests. Powdery or downy mildew can attack the leaves in times of high humidity. Removing the leaves as they die helps with this problem. Insect pests known to attack the plants include cucumber beetles, squash bugs, pickleworms, and squash vine borers. For several years my plants had significant problems with squash bugs, and I finally took a year break from growing squash to try to give the bugs a chance to completely die out. This strategy seems to have worked since there are no insect pests this year so far.



This type of squash can be prepared by roasting in the oven or cooking in the microwave. To roast in the oven; peel, seed, and cut the squash into one-inch cubes. Put on a sheet pan and drizzle with olive oil, salt, and pepper. Cook at 400 degrees for 25-30 minutes. To microwave, split the raw squash and remove the seeds. Place cut side down in a dish and microwave for 15-20 minutes. Flip the halves over and flavor with butter, a little brown sugar, and orange juice if desired. Enjoy!

Photos by Helene Haluska

References:

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