

# Squash

GWF461  
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This plant is colourful and easy to grow, but it does require a lot of space.

Both the climbing and the trailing varieties of squash plants are striking and attractive. They produce colourful and decorative edible fruits in the autumn. Squash fruits come in many different types, so when you buy your fruit, pick one you like the look of. There is no guarantee that the fruits on your plant will look like the fruit you buy, but there is a good chance that they will. The plants also have pretty yellow, star-shaped flowers. Squash plants are rampant growers and need to be given plenty of space in the garden. They are not suitable to grow indoors.

## How to grow squash plants

In the spring, buy a squash, and leave it in a warm place to go soft. It will then be fully ripe. Carefully cut the squash fruit in half and scrape out the seeds on to tissue paper with a spoon. Clean the seeds as well as possible by removing any squash flesh. This will help stop them from rotting. When the seeds are clean, lie them on a second sheet of tissue, cover them with more tissue and leave overnight in a dry place.

When the seeds are dry and no longer feel slimy to the touch, sow each one in a pot of moist multi-purpose compost. When you

sow the seeds, plant them on their edge and not on their flat sides. You should use pots about 8cm across and sow the seeds about 2cm deep. Water well and cover the pot with a clear plastic bag to keep the moisture in. Stand the pot on a warm windowsill.

The plants will take a number of weeks to start growing, but you should check them daily and water the compost if it ever looks dry. As the seedlings grow, remove the plastic bag and place the plants on a warm windowsill or in a greenhouse. As they get bigger, they will need to be repotted into larger pots of multi-purpose compost. Continue growing on the windowsill or in the greenhouse. When the shoots are 60cm long, pinch off the top. This will make it bushier and won't hurt the plant.

In June, when the risk of frost has passed, plant your plants in fertile soil in a sunny part of the garden. If you have space, you can allow them to trail across the ground, or you could grow them up a fence. If you grow them upwards you will need to train the stems in the right direction and tie them in place with soft string.

## Caring for your squash plant

Squash plants need to be well watered and fed as they grow, so give them a feed of general liquid plant food every two weeks. To get fruit, the flowers need to be pollinated. In sunny weather the bees will do it, but if the weather turns chilly, you will need to pollinate the flowers yourself. If it gets cold, rub the inside of the flowers with a soft paint brush and put any pollen you pick up into another flower. If you choose to grow a large-fruited squash, you should only let each plant produce two or three fruit. Choose the biggest fruit to keep and remove the rest. For smaller-fruited varieties this is not necessary. Squash plants only live for a year, and in autumn the plant will die.

