

Melons



Require a very sunny, sheltered position. Growing in the open is possible in warmer climates. But in temperate climates plants are best grown in cold frames or greenhouses. They require a well-drained, fertile soil with a pH of 6.5–7, a high humus content and high nitrogen levels. Add a general purpose fertiliser and well-rotted manure or compost.

Sowing Time

April-May.

Sowing

Sow seed undercover in April in trays or in 6-9cm pots. Plant seeds in twos and weed out the weaker one when they have germinated. After 6 weeks when the risk of frost has passed, harden the plants off by putting them out in the sun during the day and bringing them in at night, do this for about 5 days.

Crop Care

Plant each plant on a slight mound and protect from wind, cold weather and slugs. Cover with plastic tunnels until they have established. After five leaves have developed, pinch out each growing point to encourage further shoots. When these are well developed, reduce them to about four of the most vigorous shoots. Train two shoots on either side, between adjacent plants in the row. Remove any protective covering when the plants begin to flower to encourage insect pollination.

Squashes



Grown the same way as Melons, apart from the space needed to grow, depending on the variety. The following can be used:

- Maiden Poll
- Polo (Patty pan)
- Butternut
- Butternut Barbera
- Cobnut
- Crown Prince

Sowing Time

April-May.

Water regularly and feed every 10–14 days with a liquid feed as fruit begins to develop. Plants should be grown undercover. Shade them lightly if weather is hot. Thin to one fruit per stem when the fruits are 2.5cm (1") in diameter. Place some dried grass, tile or wood underneath each developing fruit, to protect from soil born diseases. Commercially sweet melons are suspended in nets in the air to reduce this risk. Reduce watering and feeding as the fruits start to ripen.

Harvest

Harvest 12–20 weeks after sowing. Cantaloupe and Musk melons are sweet smelling and their fruit stalks start to crack when mature. Separate the fruits gently from the stalks. Store for 14–50 days at 10–15°C (50–59°F) depending on the variety.

How to grow... Squashes

**SOW IT
GROW IT**

It's simple, easy and fresh

FROSTS
...naturally

Brampton
Buckden Road
Brampton
Huntingdon
01480 453048

Millets Farm
Kingston Road
Frilford, Nr. Abingdon
Oxfordshire
01865 391923

Willington
Sandy Road
Willington
Bedford
01234 838777

Woburn Sands
Newport Road
Woburn Sands
Milton Keynes
01908 583511

Courgettes/Marrow

Are probably the most popular of this group, they need neither peeling or seeding, merely wash or trim for serving raw or cooked.

For serving in salads blanch the whole fruit for about 2 mins in boiling water to remove the bitterness – dry, slice and serve.



Plant in a sunny spot protected from strong winds. The soil must be well-drained and rich in humus. Prepare in autumn by digging in lots of organic matter and applying a general fertiliser just before planting. Most households will need only a few plants, so prepare a few planting pockets rather than sowing long rows.

Sowing Time

End of May-June.

Sowing and Planting

Sow 3 seeds 1" deep and a few inches apart at the centre of each pocket. Cover with a large jar or cloche to hasten germination. When the first leaves appear, thin out to leave the strongest plants, alternatively buy 3-4 plants. That should be all you need in regards to courgettes. Two plants for marrows and squashes. Make sure plants that have been grown indoors or bought are hardened off before planting, this is where you put the plant out for several days and then bring it in at night.

Crop Care

Pinch out tips of the main shoots of trailing varieties when they reach 2ft long. Renew slug pellets at the first sign of damage. Keep soil moist, water copiously around the plants - not over them.

Place black polythene or mulch around the plants in summer before fruit formation. Once the fruits start to swell feed every 14 days with a tomato fertiliser. Keep fruits on a tile to prevent rotting or slug damage.

Cucumbers

Outdoor Ridge Type

A sunny spot, protected from strong winds is essential. Soil must be well-drained and rich in humus. Prepare planting pockets with compost 2 weeks before planting.



Harvesting

Remove fruits for immediate use when they are still quite small courgettes 4", marrows 8-10" long. Push thumbnail into the surface by stalk. If it goes in with ease the marrow is ready to pick. Take care when cutting them, cut where they lie and then lift them away

Courgette Varieties Include:

- Atena
- Defender
- El Greco
- Endurance
- Green Bush
- Midnight
- One ball
- Orelia

Marrow Varieties Include:

- Long green bush 3
- F1 Tiger Cross
- Table Dainty
- Spaghetti - this variety is slightly unusual. If the whole fruit is baked or boiled the insides can be scooped out completely and used as an alternative to spaghetti.

Tip

Marrows grow in the same way as courgettes. Just leave fruits to mature before cutting, boiling these can produce a watery tasteless dish, so baking or braising is better.

Sowing Time

End of May-June.

Crop Care

Pinch out growing tip when the plants have developed 6 or 7 leaves. Side shoots will then develop, and these can be left to trail over the ground or be trained up stout netting. Any shoots not bearing flowers should be pinched out at the 7th leaf. Keep soil moist. Water around the plants, not over them. Mist lightly in dry weather. Place black polythene over the soil in summer before fruit formation. This will raise the soil temperature, conserve moisture, keep down weeds and protect the fruits from rot. Once the fruits have started to swell, feed with liquid tomato fertiliser. Fertilisation is essential. Never remove the male flowers.

Greenhouse Varieties

Plant seedlings in John Innes no.3 Compost in 10" pot or growbags.

Crop Care

Keep temperature at a minimum of 60-70°F. Keep the compost moist but never waterlogged. Keep the air moist and well ventilated. Spray the floor to maintain high humidity. Train the stem up a vertical wire cane. Pinch out the growing point when the leader reaches the roof. The tip of each side shoot is pinched out at two leaves beyond a female flower. Female flowers have a miniature cucumber behind them. Male flowers have just a thin stalk. Pinch out tips of flowerless side shoots when 2ft long. Remove all male flowers from ordinary varieties because fertilised fruit is bitter. By choosing all female varieties it eliminates this problem.

Feed every 2 weeks with a tomato fertiliser once the first fruits have started to swell.

Harvesting

All female varieties, Topsy and Pepira, should be cut when they meet maximum size (this will vary depending on variety), try not to grow huge specimens or it will effect the total yield. Most types are 6-8" long, gherkins 4" and apple varieties are the size of duck eggs. Use a sharp knife to remove fruits from the stem. Good soil, proper care and continuous picking, should result in the production of many fruits until the end of September.

Pumpkins

Prepare the soil as you would with marrows. Pumpkins require a sunny but sheltered spot. Pumpkins like other members of this family are neither hardy or long suffering.



Sowing Time

April-May.

Crop Care

Seeds benefit from being soaked prior to planting. Space out plants 2-3m (6-10ft) apart. Mark the plants positions with a cane because in the height of the growing season it will be difficult to see where the plant begins and ends, when you are trying to water them. Protect young plants from slugs and mulch to retain moisture. Pumpkins can be trained onto supports if space is limited, stems can also be twinned around wire obelisks or metal loops. Flowers are usually pollinated by insects, however it does not hurt to carry out this by hand, using a paint brush and dusting each flower with pollen from another flower. Be careful not to remove all of the pollen. Pumpkins are very deep rooted so watering should only be needed when weather is exceptionally dry.

Harvesting

Cut away any foliage shading the fruits to encourage them to ripen. Harvest pumpkins 12-20 weeks after planting, leave fruits on the plant to mature as long as possible, when the stem starts to crack and the skin hardens the fruit has ripened. Cut off with a long stalk, about 6-8" should be fine. Leave the fruit in the sun for about 10 days so that the skin hardens (this is essential for carving).

Varieties

- Amazonka
- F1 Becky
- Hundredweight