Squash (summer)

**Nutritional Value:**
Most varieties of summer squash offer potassium, folate, and vitamin A.

**Challenges / Advantages:**
They grow like weeds, once established. Seriously. Once the zucchini start producing, keep on top of harvesting them while small to medium sized or you will have to give the 10 lb doorstops to your neighbors. And they won’t call you back. Locks will be installed on all doors. People will have to move. Just avoid all this by harvesting continually while the fruits are still smallish.

**Sowing:**
You don’t need too many plants for a plentiful supply. Keep that in mind while sowing squash. They are traditionally direct seeded outdoors once the soil warms up to above 60 degrees. There is little need to start them as seedlings ahead of time since they are very robust growers.

If you need to just get a few plants supported, you can individually amend the planting holes. Just dig a hole about a foot deep, add compost and soil mix, then direct sow seeds when soil is warm (>60 degrees) from ½ to 2” deep depending on warmth of soil. (Warmer soil can be planted deeper)
Sow two seeds at each location and space holes at 18” centers. Thin to single stronger plant once established growth is 4-6” tall.

**Soil prep:**
Squash do best in loose soil amended with 2” of compost worked into the top 6” of soil.

**Growing Conditions:**
Squash do best in full sun exposure. They do very well in hot climates.

**Planting tips:**
Squash will spread out quite a bit in a garden bed. Keep that in mind when spacing them. Don’t plant too close to smaller plants that will need sun exposure that may be shadowed by large layers of squash leaves. Plant squash near borders of the garden so you can direct their above ground growth outside the growing beds to optimize space in beds for other plants.

**Watering:**
Squash of all kinds need consistent, moderate water. Some people like to plant squash in hills. I don’t do that much since the hills above the soil profile tend to dry
out faster during summer months and require more frequent watering. I actually create depressions around the plant so the water pools there during rain, and ensures constant water supply. Drip-fed irrigation works well since it easily waters the roots below the large canopy. The leaves are kept drier this way, which helps minimize fungal disease.

**Harvest:**
Harvest the fruit when they have grown to 4-8” length. Each variety will differ a slight amount, but in general, the smaller ones are more flavorful and tender. The practice of picking early and often actually keeps the plant in production. If you leave fruit on the vine too long, the plant will direct most of its energy toward supporting the growth of the behemoths and production of other fruit will stop.

**Notes:**
Squash has been grown in north and south America for over 5000 years. Most zucchini varieties, if allowed to grow fruit too large, get woody and bitter. The only exception I have found is the Romanesco variety that holds flavor even when the fruits are over a foot long. It doesn’t get too seedy, and I dry it, thinly sliced in the solar dryer to re-hydrate in soups all winter.

**Cooking:**
The recipes for squash are endless; stir fried, baked, stewed, au gratin, in sauce, etc. You name it and you can probably improve it by adding some fresh squash.

**Storage:**
Summer squash is best when used shortly after harvest. If frozen or dried it will last far longer. Thinly sliced squash can be dried in a dehydrator or solar dryer, or chopped and frozen in zip lock bags.

**Good Varieties:** Darkstar, Anton, Black Beauty Zucchini, Goldy, Zephyr, Sunburst, Yellow Crookneck, Dark Green Zucchini, Early Prolific Straight neck, Cocozell, the original zucchini (1856), Costata Romanesco,