

# CUCURBITS GROWING GUIDE

(CUCUMBERS, GOURDS,  
MUSKMELONS, PUMPKINS,  
SUMMER SQUASH, WATERMELONS,  
AND WINTER SQUASH)



The cucurbits family is a large one, containing many of the favorite vegetables common to the summer and winter larder alike. Most are very easy to grow, and many can be stored long-term.

SPECIES	WHEN TO SOW	SUN / PART SHADE	SEED SPACING	ROW SPACING	PLANTING DEPTH	SPACING AFTER THINNING	DAYS TO GERMINATE	DAYS TO MATURITY
Cucumbers	After last frost	Sun/Part Shade	2 inches	2-4 feet	½ inch	6-12 inches	3-7	50-60
Gourds	Indoors, 4-5 weeks before Trans-planting	Sun/Part Shade	3 inches	8 feet	1-2 feet	4-5 feet	7-56	110-140
Muskmelons	After last frost	Sun/Part Shade	4 inches	5-6 feet	½ - ¾ inches	2 feet	5-10	70-100
Pumpkins	After last frost	Sun/Part Shade	3 inches	4-5 feet	1 inch	18 inches	4-7	90-120
Summer Squash	After last frost	Sun/Part Shade	3 inches	4-5 feet	1 inch	18 inches	4-7	42-60
Watermelons	After last frost	Sun/Part Shade	4 inches	5-6 feet	½ - ¾ inches	2 feet	5-10	58-90
Winter Squash	After last frost	Sun/Part Shade	3 inches	4-5 feet	1 inch	18 inches	4-7	70-100

## Soil and Fertilizing

All the cucurbits except watermelons prefer a pH between 6.2 and 6.8; watermelons can handle a range of 5.5-6.8. It is best to have your soil tested before planting, so you know what nutrients and pH adjustments may be needed. For a thorough soil test, consult your local county extension office.

High levels of organic matter will also benefit these plants, so if you plant a cover crop like rye grass and till it under before planting cucurbits, they'll have an excellent start. Pumpkins in particular require a lot of food, so provide them with a good all-purpose plant food or fertilizer. Compost also works well.

Most of these vegetables, especially watermelons, do best in well-drained, sandy soils. All of them need soils with temperatures of 70-90 degree Fahrenheit. Melon seedlings are especially susceptible to damping off (fungus wilt), so don't plant them in cooler, damp soils.

All cucurbits are susceptible to cucumber beetles. After an infection, it's best not to grow them in the same location for several years.

## Watering

Being largely water themselves, most cucurbits need deep watering, at a rate of 1-2 inches per week, especially early in the growing season. Just take care not to soak them.

**Melons:** The most common stressor for melons is under-watering, so make sure they are well irrigated for a sweeter final product.

**Gourds:** Drastically decrease watering your gourds (and gourds only) in August. This triggers the drying and hardening process. It is typical to lose a few of your gourds during the drying process.

## Harvesting / Storage

Cucumbers and summer squash can be picked several times per week. You can pick cucumbers at any stage before they turn yellow. Summer squash are best eaten while young and tender, before the seeds ripen and the rind hardens.

Most melons, including muskmelons, are ready for harvest when they slip easily from the vine. If possible, hold off on watermelons until the fruits are the full size for the cultivar. Similarly, pumpkins are ripe when the fruits are full size and the proper color for the cultivar, usually orange or white. See the seed packet for specifics.

Gourds and pumpkins require a very long growing season. For gourds, this partly has to do with the fact that they may take up to six weeks to germinate. Pumpkins often take longer to mature due to their large sizes.

Muskmelons and watermelons can last a week or two before eating, but are best consumed as soon as possible. However, pumpkins and winter squash can literally last for months without spoiling.

Winter squash should be allowed to mature and develop hard rinds, so they can be stored for winter use. Store them in a cool, dark, dry place to maximize their use life. You may need a very sharp knife or cleaver to pierce the rind, especially with acorn squash!