

The Delicious Delicata

A taste you'll never forget...

Delicata squash, as all squash, are members of the Cucurbita family. This includes pumpkins, squash, and cucumbers. Delicata squash are also known as the peanut squash or sweet potato squash, having a long cylindrical shape and cream color with dark forest green stripes. They are a winter squash. The difference between summer and winter squash is that winter squash though grown in the warm weather, are harvested and eaten when the seeds within are fully formed and the outer skin has hardened to a tough rind. This allows them to be stored for several months in a cool dark dry location at about 50–60 degrees F.

To grow winter squash, it's important to first select one that is appropriate for the size of your garden, as most winter squash like to sprawl out and need plenty of space. Vining squash require a large garden, while semi-vining and bush varieties of winter squash are appropriate for smaller gardens. Vining delicata need about 60 square feet to grow.



All squash require warm soil temperature to germinate. If planted too soon, the seed will rot. Even the slightest frost can kill a seedling. Plant when soil temperature is 70 degrees F. and there is no longer a danger of frost. Squash need a well-drained soil with organic matter. Use an organic fertilizer to help your plant along. Do not over water. Squash grow best in soil that doesn't stay wet, so water infrequently. The ideal method to water is to use a drip or soaker hose. They insure a good deep watering of the plant, while keeping water off of foliage. Powdery mildew can set on with wet foliage.



The most important part of harvesting your winter squash is making sure you harvest them before the first frost of fall. As the squash mature, you'll notice that the stems will start to dry out. This is the sign to harvest. Depending on where you live, you can expect to start harvesting in September and finish by October or early November.

Because of the vast varieties of sizes and colors, the rule of thumb for harvesting winter squash is when they are a full size and have a deep rich color. The rinds should be hard to the touch and the fruit will snap off the vine when picked. If you harvest your winter squashes too early, they may lack flavor.

You can use a bypass pruner to cut through the stem and remove the squash, leaving about 2½ inches of the stem on the fruit. A short stem can lead to rot. This

may not be possible with smaller varieties, however. In these cases, preserve as much as the stem as possible. It's also important not to damage your squash when harvesting and storing, as they can go bad more quickly. If you have a large crop, it is best not to stack them too high as they need plenty of air space so they won't prematurely rot.

Some winter squash need to be "cured" before storing. Curing your squash requires storing them in higher temperatures (around 68 degrees F. or slightly higher) for a minimum of fifteen days. You then move them to a cool, dry place. Don't store your squash where there is a risk of freezing. Delicata and acorn squash do not need to be cured.

Another option for storage is to cut your squash into chunks and store them uncooked in freezer bags. Use your frozen squash quickly to maintain flavor. Do not store whole squash in the refrigerator, as humidity levels are much too high.

The flesh of delicata squash is fine and sweet and will make two servings, but once you taste it, watch out, you will want one all for yourself.

Several varieties to try are:

–*Sweet Dumpling* is a slightly flattened version of the Delicata.

–*Sugar Loaf* is very sweet and oval shaped.

–*Honey Boat* is shaped like the typical Delicata, but has a very sweet flavor.

–*Cornell's Bush* was named 2002 AAS Winner, disease resistant, heavy producer.

Source: [Squash Growing Tips](#)