



Planting Vine Crops

Cucumbers, Melons, Pumpkins, and Squash

At a Glance

Soil: well-drained, high in organic matter

Temperature: plant once daytime temperatures are consistently above 55 degrees

Mulch: black plastic mulch can lend earlier production & higher yields

Seeds/Transplants: direct-seeding may lend higher yields; if transplanting, plants should never be more than 2-4 weeks old

- **Soils-** Vine crops thrive in well-drained soils high in organic matter. Yearly applications of compost will likely supply needed nutrients.

- **Mulch-** Use black plastic mulch for earlier production and higher yields. It also controls weeds and conserves water.

- **Planting time-** Do not plant too early. Daytime temperatures should consistently be above 55 degrees. Protect young, tender plants from cool winds.

- **Seeds or Transplants-** Direct seeding is reported to give higher yields. If using transplants, they should be small, never more than 2-4 weeks old.

- **Blossom Drop-**

- Vine crops have male flowers and female

flowers (small fruit behind the flower). Male flowers

develop first, and generally predominate. Young fruits that are not pollinated will abort.

- When bee activity is limited, increase yields by hand pollination. Pick a male flower, remove petals, and touch the center of the female flowers with the male flower. This is best done in the morning.
- Any form of stress (like too much or too little water, poor soil conditions, extreme heat, and wind) can reduce flowering and lead to abortion of fruits.

- **Harvesting**

- Cucumbers- Harvest regular slicing cucumbers when they about 6 to 8 inches long (slicing varieties). Harvest dills at 4 to 6 inches long and pickles at 2 inches long for pickles.
- Muskmelons (cantaloupes) - When well netted, coloring up and with a good aroma. Ripe melon easily separates from its stem.
- Summer squash- Wear gloves, some plant stems are thorny. Cut the yellow ones like crookneck, at 5-6 inches, patty pan at 3 inches, zucchini at 6-8 inches.
- Winter squash and pumpkins- The more maturity they attain, the sweeter they become. Cut after a light frost (28-31 degrees) when richly colored and the skin is tough enough to resist piercing with a thumbnail. Cut stem at 2 inches. Cure in field 7-10, covering in the evening if frost is expected. Before storing, wash with a solution of 1 part bleach to 10 parts water to help prevent mold.



- Watermelons- The tendril next to the stem end will have dried, the ground-spot will be yellow and a thump with your knuckle will bring a dull thud.
- Winter melons (casaba, Crenshaw, honeydew) - When well-colored and aromatic. These can be stored indoors for a few weeks.

David Whiting, C. O. (2011, July). *Colorado Master Gardener Notes #719*. Retrieved from Colorado State University Extension: www.cmg.colostate.edu

Droll, C. (n.d.). Timing important in harvesting garden veggies. *The Denver Post*. Denver, Colorado, United States.