

Bell County Master Gardeners
Tip of the Week
By Candy Mullen
“Let’s choose Squash!”

Did you know that squash is one of the native fruits of the Americas? Yes, that’s right, it is actually a fruit, not a vegetable. By botanical definition, fruits have their seeds on the inside. Squash and gourds are fruit, as are tomatoes. The word “squash” is derived from “askutasquash” from the language of Native Americans (Nahahiganseck Sovereign Nation) that lived in Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts. It literally means “ a green thing eaten raw.”

Right now is the true season to select those wonderful winter squashes for great nutrition, flavor, and color. There are also summer squash varieties, but the season now is for winter. Squash is very versatile, nutritious, and can be eaten either raw or cooked, served alone or as a side dish, like pumpkin pie! Squashes generally refer to four species of the genus *Cucurbita*, also called **marrows**.

Winter squash matures on the vine and develops an inedible, thick, hard rind, are quite heavy for their size and a deep colored, tough skin. Do not choose a squash that has sunken or moldy spots and avoid those that have cuts or bruises. Avoid those that have a tender rind, this indicates immaturity and not a developed flavor. Avoid storing squash near apples, avocados or passion fruit as these are natural ripening agents and will not be good for the squash.

A fall garden in central Texas is ideal for growing winter squash, gourds, and pumpkins so plan on doing so next season. Some delicious and unusual varieties could include: acorn (acorn shaped, sweet), amberscup (orange skin, resembles a pumpkin), autumn cup (dark green, rich flavor), butternut (vase or bell shape, sweet), buttercup (turban shape, dark and light green), carnival (cream or pale green color), delicata (heirloom variety, tastier like corn and sweet potatoes), fairytale pumpkin (flattened like cheese, baking), gold nugget (oriental pumpkin, small, orange), hubbard (warted skin, large, yellow flesh), kabocha (green, blueish-gray skin), spaghetti (small, golden-yellow, large is best, use flesh as noodles), and sweet dumpling squashes (cream colored, miniature pumpkin, stuff it!).

Squash is one of the “three sisters” taught by the Native Americans to be planted together: maize (corn), beans, and squash. The stalk allowed the beans to climb and the shade for the squash, and the squash vines prevented the weeds from growing!

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmqa@gmail.com