

Gem Squash - Instructions For Best Results

As with most seeds, not all seeds will germinate. This is why we actually pack a few extra seeds in the package. These instructions will also help you be successful in growing your great tasting Gem Squash !

If you are not planting a large number we have had the most success by germinating the squash seeds in a jar with a wet paper towel. You can use plastic or glass jar and any paper towel to keep the seeds damp and warm but watch out for mold.

You only need enough water to keep the paper towel wet, not so deep as to “drown” the seeds. This creates something of a micro-environment where the water doesn’t evaporate and the towel won’t dry out. The only thing to do next is to place the jar in a warm place but generally not in direct sunlight where they may get cooked. Don’t put too many seeds close together as it becomes very difficult to separate them once they germinate.

As each seed germinates, 7 – 14 days, which is very visible, once the root is about ½ inch long we remove the seed and place it into a small seed start pot with seed starter soil, or the soil we intend to plant the squash into for the duration of it’s growth. Don’t put the seed too deep into the soil. We drop the seed into a small depression in the soil basically deep enough to cover the root and leave the top of the seed exposed. As the seedling grows the seed casing will lift on the top of the plant, eventually splitting and falling off.

You can also skip the germination step outlined above and just place the seed into a seed starter pot, coco seed starter, or one of those Ferry Morse seed trays with small pods. The key with any of these methods is to combine the right amount of water with the right amount of heat. The soil / material should be damp but not too wet and the soil should remain warm and the seed needs to be near the surface, even with the top visible will work.

Once the seeds have germinated and reached the stage where you can see green leaves (typically 2) on the top which will be pinned together probably by the seed casing, you must make sure not to keep the medium too wet or to dry out or the plant will die.

Once the seed casing is ready to fall off, or has fallen off, it’s a good time to start hardening off the plant ready for the garden. To do this, don’t place it in direct sunlight but, for a few days, place the plant outside in the shade, or indirect or filtered sunlight. Too much sun and the plant will fry and make sure it is after your last frost.

Once you are comfortable that the plant will survive full sun, put it in the full sun to check and, if it starts to wilt, move it out of the sun.

After you have planted it out in your garden you will need to watch for mildew, or fungus. Mildew / mold is white and starts as white spots. There are a number of fungicides that can be used, we have found Milstop (potassium bicarbonate) to be effective with the white mildew. You will also need to keep an eye out for bugs. Check on the underside of the leaves for eggs and spray as necessary. Squash will start to appear fairly quickly and you should be able to start picking about 60 days after planting out.

As a combination of treatment we have used Copper fungicide and Insecticidal soap. These, and the Milstop, are organic products. Generally, certified organics require more frequent treatment to keep the insects and fungus at bay. If you are not concerned about organics, then Sevin is a very effective insecticide with, I think, a 7 day preharvest interval but READ THE LABELS on all chemicals used.

The squash themselves are pretty hardy and, as delicate as the vine they grow on may seem, it is very strong. You can allow the squash to just creep along the ground. Note that this will result in some squash turning yellow at the bottom. Generally we have not seen the squash attacked by insects the way melons are attacked, from beneath.

We grow some squash along a fence line and the vine is certainly strong enough to hold the fruit up in the air. This is more useful as you are not walking all over the plant to pick the fruit, which will be producing a lot longer than you think.

Another alternative is to plant the squash in a raised bed and then stake out a piece of fence wire around the bed and the vine will grow out across the fence wire with the squash hanging below making it easy to pick.

Pick your squash around baseball size or bigger. Enjoy !