

Growing Summer Squash, Cucumbers Is A 'Vine' Experience

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Like children, yellow summer squash, zucchini, and cucumbers — also known as "vine crops" — respond best to tender, loving care early and then need to be given space to go out on their own, according to a vegetable expert in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

"As long as you plant vine crops on raised beds and allow room for growth, you should have plenty of produce for the summer," said Peter Ferretti, professor of vegetable crops. "That's if you're willing to put in a little more work early in the process."

Ferretti said all vine crops can be transplanted if plantable containers or plastic pop-out containers are used, so gardeners can buy starter plants from garden centers or grow their own from seed. He said all vine crops require about a 21-day growth period from seed to transplantation. "Count out 21 days before Memorial Day and plant your seeds," he said.

Ferretti suggests planting three seeds per starter container, then allowing only the most vigorous seedling to grow to maturity. "In order for vine plants to germinate quickly, the tempera-

ture must be about 75 degrees Fahrenheit," he said. "They also require as much light as you can give them."

Once seedlings are ready, they should be planted in the evening to reduce heat shock. As soon as the plants are in the soil, they must be covered with a light mesh row cover, also known as a "floating row cover."

"Cucumber beetles and corn rootworm beetles will immediately zero in on new vine plants," Ferretti emphasizes. "They can ruin all the plants in one night. Make sure the row cover is anchored securely. It will allow air and water to reach the plants, but not the insects."

Using row covers will reduce or eliminate pesticide use. If gardeners want to use pesticides, Ferretti recommends calling a Penn State Cooperative Extension office or a local garden center for information. More information also is listed in a fact sheet, "Growing Cucurbits," available at all extension offices.

For proper spacing, Ferretti recommends planting pickling cucumbers six inches apart, slicing cucumbers about 12 inches apart, and zucchini and summer squash 18 to 24 inches apart. Each row should be a raised-earth bed covered with plastic

mulch or film. Raised beds will make it easier for gardeners to move among the plants, improve drainage, and reduce disease problems.

Ferretti said gardeners get the best results from trickle irrigation hoses or tapes, but standard watering is effective as well.

As soon as flowers form on the plants, about three weeks after transplanting, remove the row covers. "Vine crops must have multiple pollinations, so you shouldn't discourage honey bees or bumblebees by using insecticides. If the plant flowers and just produces a tiny fruit that turns yellow and drops off, then you have a pollination problem."

Vine crops require just moderate fertilization. Ferretti recommends using a 5-10-5 or 5-10-10 fertilizer at a rate of 3 1/2 (three and one-half) pounds per 100 square feet before or right after planting. "You want a reduced nitrogen fertilizer because nitrogen will put more growth into the foliage, not the crop."

Zucchini and summer squash should be picked when they are 6 to 8 inches long. "The exceptions are smaller middle eastern varieties, which should be picked when 4 inches in length," Ferretti said.

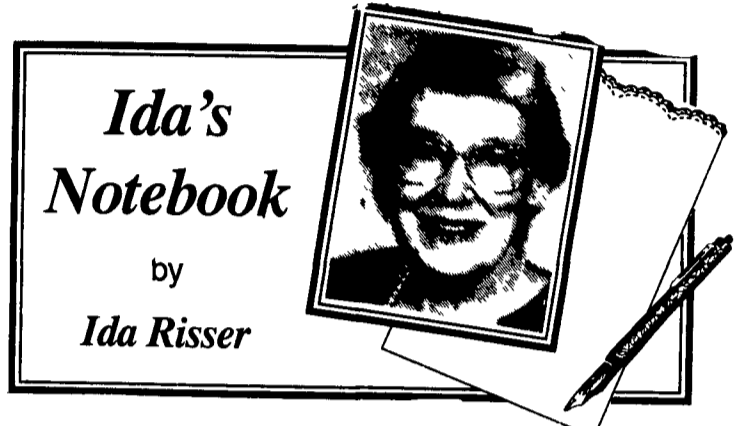
Pickling cucumbers should be picked when 3 to 4 inches long, or at 2 inches if planning to pickle gherkins. Standard or slicing cucumbers can be picked when they reach 8 inches. Gourmet or burpless cucumbers should grow at least 11 or 12 inches before picking.

"Rely on the seed packet for harvesting information," Ferretti said. "The longer gourmet cucumbers are rarely found in supermarkets because their skin is so fragile they are rarely shipped. These are perfect for

gardeners and also can be found at local farm markets."

By late June, gardeners will need to spray for squash vine borers two times, one week apart. Ferretti recommends asking local garden centers for appropriate pesticides.

Ferretti said recommended cucumber varieties are resistant to many diseases and top squash varieties usually are tolerant of mildews and some viruses. Gardeners can use a general fungicide that contains copper to prevent leaf spots and some mildews.



*Ida's
Notebook*
by
Ida Risser

The leaves on the trees in our meadow have shut us off from our neighbors. We are surrounded by a sea of various shades of green. There is plenty of work to keep us busy here at home.

I've had sugar peas to pick since the middle of May. They are earlier this year as they were planted in March. The pheasant that I mentioned earlier, who lives in our yard, has found our strawberry patch. However, I do believe that there will be enough for him and for us.

Last week I attended a women's luncheon at our church. As is my custom, I was able to take a large bouquet of iris. There were six different shades of blue, yellow and brown. As the petals break off easily it was a problem to transport them safely in the car. I usually cut a hole, the size of the

vase base, in a large cereal box in order to hold them upright in the car.

Our speaker for the day was a lady who was a quilter. She displayed some of her work and gave a talk on their background. It is an art from frontier days and they are not only beautiful but also serve a useful purpose.

We are not big popcorn eaters. But, one rainy day I decided to use some popcorn that we were given long ago. So, after popping it in a heavy kettle on the stove I decided to make caramel corn.

It ended up filling two big roasting pans and was shared with another family. I'll bet it won't take long for the three grandchildren to empty the tins and bags of this snack.

Now I must pull more weeds while the ground is still quite wet.



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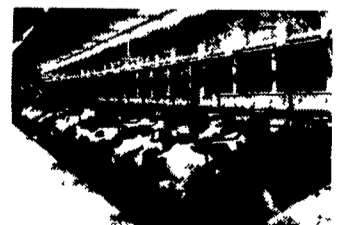
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