

Zucchini

Grow

A delicate summer squash

Zucchini is a type of summer, soft shell squash. It is a fruit biologically because it has seeds and grows on flowering plants. Zucchini is considered a vegetable in the culinary or nutrition world because of the nutrients it provides. Other types of summer squash include: Crookneck (yellow), Opo, Pattypan, Scallopini and Straightneck. Zucchini is the most popular summer squash variety. It is a member of the *Cucurbitaceae* family, with melons, pumpkins, cucumbers and gourds. Zucchini is a more delicate *Cucurbit* and is eaten fresh, shortly after harvest.

The largest producers of squash worldwide are the United States, China, India, and Russia. In the U.S., the top squash-growing states are California, Florida, Georgia, and New York. Summer squash can be available year round. In North Carolina, summer squash are grown in both the spring and fall.

Zucchini seeds can be started indoors in peat pots 2-4 weeks before the last frost. Seedlings can be transplanted from after the last frost until midsummer. If planting seeds directly in a garden, place 1 inch deep and 2 feet apart. Zucchini prefer warm (60°F at 2 inches), loamy soil and full sun. Zucchini can grow on vines or bushy plants, which take up less space.¹⁻⁵

Fun Fact: Zucchini plants are *monoecious*, which means they produce both male and female flowers on the same plant.¹⁻³

Choose

Zucchini should be cylindrical in shape with dark green shiny skin and some light speckling. Look for zucchini with a slightly prickly, but shiny skin. The skin should be firm. Be careful of zucchini that is pitted, dull or spotted or has lots of cuts and bruises. Zucchini come in small, medium and large sizes. Bigger is not always better. Small to medium-sized zucchini are the most flavorful. The darker the skin of the zucchini, the richer the nutrients.¹⁻⁵



Fun Fact: Did you know the zucchini flower is edible? In Mexico, the flower is preferred over the zucchini. The flower can be stuffed and baked. It can also be added to soups, frittatas or quesadillas.²

Store

Zucchini are highly perishable. Store it in the refrigerator at 45-50°F and 85-95% relative humidity up to 10 days. Keep away from ethylene-producing fruits and vegetables such as apples, pears and tomatoes. Do not wash until you are ready to use it. Cooked zucchini can be stored in the refrigerator, but it should be used within 2 days.^{4,5}

Fun Fact: Zucchini bread is one of the most popular ways to use zucchini.

Use

The skin, flesh and seeds of zucchini can be eaten raw or cooked. Before eating or cooking, wash zucchini under clean, running water. Try to leave the skin on for the most nutrients. Young zucchini is excellent in salads while older varieties are better cooked. Raw zucchini can be sliced and served with other vegetables and hummus, salsa or low fat dressing. It can be shredded into long strands and prepared like pasta. Raw zucchini can also be shaved and mixed into the batter of baked goods for an extra moist texture and great flavor. Zucchini can be boiled, steamed, stir fried, grilled, baked, roasted or even pickled.²⁻⁵

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Teach

This is one vegetable with a history

Scientists have found squash seeds preserved in Mexican caves for more than 10,000 years! Summer squash originated in Mexico and Central America and were one of the foods Columbus brought back from North America. Portuguese and Spanish explorers then introduced squashes to many parts of the world. Zucchini was created as a result of natural mutations. It was first brought to the United States in the 1920s by Italians.

Bees are good helpers

Honeybees are the primary pollinators for zucchini plants. The ratio of male to female flowers during the growing season is about 3 to 1. Only the female flowers can bear fruit. The zucchini grows from the base of the female flower on a short stem. Once the fruit is set, zucchini can grow up to 1 inch per day.¹⁻³

Fun Fact: Italians called green summer squash “zucchini”. The French called it “courgette”. Both names mean “small squash”. In Great Britain, zucchini is called “vegetable marrow”.³

Classroom Activity - Count the Seeds

Materials Needed:

- Zucchini, washed
- Cutting board
- Knife

Steps: *Use food safety steps. Wash hands and produce.

1. Wash hands thoroughly, with soap and water.
2. Slice raw zucchini into ½ inch rounds.
3. Distribute 2 to 3 rounds per student.
4. In groups, have students count the small seeds in each of their zucchini rounds.
5. Ask students to add up the total number of seeds for their group.
6. Ask students to make bar graphs showing the number of seeds per student in each group.
7. Come together as a class and make an additional bar graph of the number of seeds per group.

Eat

For sliced zucchini, one cup raw has about 19 calories and ½ cup cooked has about 13 calories. Zucchini is free of cholesterol and low in fat and sodium. It is a good source of vitamin C and manganese. Cooked zucchini has more vitamin A per serving. A cup of cooked zucchini has more potassium than a medium banana. Vitamin C helps form collagen to hold muscles, bones and tissues together, protects us from infection and bruising, aids in healing, keeps our gums healthy, helps our body absorb iron and folate from plants we eat, and acts as an antioxidant to prevent cell damage. Manganese helps with forming bone and converting carbohydrate, protein and fat into energy. Vitamin A promotes normal vision, supports the growth and health of cells and tissues, protects us from infection and helps regulate the immune system. Potassium helps maintain normal blood pressure, regulate fluids and mineral balance, transmit nerve signals and contract muscles. The phytochemical lutein in zucchini helps with maintaining normal vision.⁴⁻⁷

Fun Fact: Obetz, Ohio has an annual Zucchini Festival.⁸

Class Activity - Name that Produce

Steps:

1. Ask students to list a fruit or vegetable starting with each letter of the alphabet. “Z” is “zucchini”. For “e”, “v” and “x”, some options are endive, eggplant, Vidalia onion, xigua and ximenia. Students can also create their own hybrid fruit or vegetable.
2. Research and share photos of produce on the class list.

Find

For more zucchini info and resources, visit:

1. North Carolina State Extension, www.ces.ncsu.edu
2. Utah State University Extension, <http://extension.usu.edu>
3. California Harvest of the Month, <http://harvestofthemonth.cdph.ca.gov>
4. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, www.fns.usda.gov
5. Produce for Better Health Foundation, <https://fruitsandveggies.org>
6. USDA Food Composition Databases, <http://ndb.nal.usda>
7. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, www.eatright.org