



## All About Squash

**If you're already growing squash—or even if you're not—here are some squash facts you can't miss.**

There are about 825 species of squash.

Winter squash belongs to the botanical family Cucurbitaceae, which comprises 119 genera and approximately 825 species. While hardly the largest of the plant families, Cucurbitaceae is highly specialized and includes many familiar and economically important fruits and vegetables, including squash, pumpkins, cucumbers, melons, luffas and gourds.

Considered a culinary vegetable, squash isn't really a vegetable at all. Both winter and summer squash are ovaries containing seeds and, therefore, are botanical fruits—berries, in fact. As the squash's fruit develops and attaches below other floral parts of the plant, it's an "epigynous" or false berry. Other false berries are banana, watermelon, blueberry and cranberry. All berries produced by the Cucurbitaceae family are labeled pepos.

Some summer and winter squash are categorized by species, but there is crossover. The distinguishing characteristic is maturity at consumption. Summer squash are eaten young, while they're still quite perishable and their skins and seeds are soft. Winter squash are enjoyed at full maturity and have hardened shells that contribute to their long storage life.

The term "squash" is an abbreviation of the Native American Narragansett word askutasquash, which translates as "eaten raw or uncooked," apparently a reference to zucchini. Not all English speakers use the word squash, though. In England, it's called marrow. Some cultures use squash and pumpkin interchangeably.

About the Author: Adrienne L. Shtop is a writer and photographer who follows the squash trail each fall from the Hudson River Valley to the Green Mountains and back.