

BORDER CROSSINGS

ORIGINS

BOTANY BAY LEARNING RESOURCES

Squash and Pumpkins



Squashes at Kew Gardens

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/ea/Squashes_at_Kew_Gardens_IncrEdibles_2013.jpg



A selection of pumpkins

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/0c/-_Pumpkins_-_jpg

What do Indigenous people call this plant?

The word "squash" is an English corruption of the Narragansett word "askutasquash" meaning "a green thing eaten raw." The Abenaki (from North Eastern North America) word for pumpkin or squash is "wasawa". The word squash was first recorded in English in 1640.

The name pumpkin comes from the Greek word "pepon" which means "large melon". The French turned it into "pompon" and the English changed it to "pumpion". The name "pumpkin" was used by American colonists.

Europeans were familiar with gourds which are similar to squash and pumpkins but are inedible and mostly used to store liquids. The word gourd dates back to around 1275 to 1325 and is derived from the Old French word "cöorde".

When was this plant first documented?

The oldest documented recording of squash are found in the Villa Farnesina in Rome. They are paintings of pumpkins and squash (along with melons and courgettes) which were created between 1515 and 1518.

How many varieties of this plant are known?

There are over 100 varieties of squash and 150 varieties of pumpkin. The squash is a member of the cucurbitaceae family, which includes cantaloupes, cucumbers, courgettes, honeydew melons, gourds, pumpkins and watermelons. There are two main differences between pumpkin and squash: the

pumpkin stem is hard and jagged but the squash stem is light and hollow. Also, pumpkin flowers have a spherical flower base, and squash flowers have a more cylindrical base.

Where and how was the plant originally grown and used?

Squash and pumpkins are cultivated as part of the Three Sisters gardening technique, an efficient system that allows three crops to be grown together. Maize is planted in the middle of the plot, climbing beans are planted around the maize and squash or pumpkins are planted around the edge. The taller maize and climbing beans offer shade to the low lying squash and pumpkin vines which stop the ground from getting too dried so the maize crops will be larger. So, in combination, the plants work together. Also, the squash and pumpkin vines can be used as fertiliser.

Pumpkins are very versatile. They were baked, boiled, mashed and roasted. The seeds are highly nutritious and were eaten - although initially pumpkins were grown for their flesh and the seeds were not eaten. Dried pumpkin was ground into flour. Pumpkin flesh could be dried and flattened and then woven into mats. Pumpkins also keep well and can be set aside and stored for winter and in case of famine.

How do Indigenous people relate to this plant?

It was originally thought that squash originated in areas we now call Mexico and Central America, archaeologists have found evidence of squash consumption and cultivation in south western North America and north eastern North America. It seems that squash cultivation has been practised by Indigenous peoples for over 10,000 years - even longer than maize.

Squash was also widely cultivated and eaten by the Pueblo peoples of the southwestern United States, as well as the Apaches, Hopi, Navajo, Havasupai, Papago, Pima, Zuni, Navajo and Yuman peoples.

Pumpkins were not a seasonal food for the pre-Columbian people of Mesoamerica as they are for many people today. For the pre-Columbian Aztec people, beans, maize and squash were the three staple foods used in almost every meal. Nopales (a type of cactus) and tomatoes were often added. Chilli and salt were also used in many dishes. The flowers from pumpkin and squash plants were also eaten as part of a salad.

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Pumpkins were small and had a bitter taste. However, through selective breeding they became larger and sweeter. The outer layer of the pumpkin and squash have many and can be made into many things including bowls, fishing floats, ladles, musical instruments, pipes, storage containers and water carriers.

When and how did this plant first come to Britain?

The pumpkin was first introduced to Britain in the 1500s by the French. It was quickly adopted as a pie filling.

Special properties

Pumpkin seeds are high in fatty acids. The flesh is used by the Indigenous people of the Americas in savoury and sweet dishes. It is often used in soups and stews,

Squash seeds are high in fibre and protein. The flesh is usually used by the Indigenous people of the Americas as a vegetable.

Fun facts

Pumpkins are 90% water.

The pumpkin is actually a fruit - it is a product of the seed-bearing structure of flowering plants. Whereas vegetables are the edible portion of plants such as the bulbs, flowers, leaves, roots, stems and tubers.

Resources edited by Phil Hindmarsh. Project Manager Marine Begault.

BOTANY BAY is a participation and learning project by Border Crossings' ORIGINS Festival, made possible with The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Thanks to National Lottery players, we have been able to engage five schools across the country with the Indigenous heritage of plants, gardens and food.



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