

What is the best way to plant squash?



Gardening
Carol Savonen
Guest columnist

Question: I am wondering whether it is better to start squash seeds indoors then transplant outside or just wait and plant the seed outdoors. Which works better?

Answer: Planting squash seed directly and starting the plants indoors both work well for me. To ensure success, I do both. I start some seeds indoors in 4 to 6-inch pots in the last half of April, about 2 weeks before Salem's average last frost, which is in early May. Then, I plant some squash directly from seed outdoors.

Squash seeds germinate best when the soil temperature is at least 70 degrees F. You'll have some success above 60 degrees, but any soil cooler than this, and squash seeds will most likely rot. If you really want to know if it is time to plant, get yourself a soil thermometer.

Hedge your bets. Plant winter (e.g. delicata, butternut, acorn) and summer squash (e.g. zucchini, patty pan) indoors now in pots and plant some outdoors after the soil warms up to at least 60 degrees. Since winter squash takes more days to mature harvest date, I grow these in a south facing berm covered in black weed-barrier cloth. The soil heats up fast in this berm, so I usually direct sow my winter squash seeds there as early as I can. Summer squash can be planted later and still reach maturity.

Once they germinate, squash seedlings grow quickly. In a couple of weeks your indoor-sown plants will be ready to bring outdoors and "cold harden" them off. By placing the seedlings outside in a protected area for 5 days or more, you'll help the plant adjust to outdoor condi-

tions. Don't wait too long to plant after this, or your plant will become root bound.

If your outdoor sown squash seeds have germinated, let those keep growing and give your indoor potted, cold-hardened squash starts to a friend. They'll probably be delighted.

To hasten squash seed germination outdoors, mulch your planting area with black plastic or weed cloth. Cut a hole in the plastic for each plant. Make sure to situate your squash plants in an area that receives at least 8 hours of sun a day for optimum performance.

You can create a mini-hot house environment that usually speeds ground germination up as well, by placing a clear plastic container over the area where your squash seeds are in the ground.

As soon as you see the seed leaves poke through the soil surface, remove the container and replace it with a mesh basket to protect the tender young seedling from predation by birds or other critters.

If your garden space is limited, I recommend planting "bush" varieties of winter and summer squash. Bush varieties have been bred to have shorter vines. Longer vined varieties take up way more space. There are bush varieties available of many types of squash.

Wait until the soil warms to above 70 degrees F to plant all the other warm season vegetables including tomatoes, eggplants, peppers, cucumbers, squash, corn and melons.

Unlike quick growing squash plants, tomatoes, eggplants and pepper plants are slow-growing and take many weeks to reach the stage where you can plant them out in the garden. This late in the season, these are best purchased as transplants from your local garden center rather than started from seed at home.



Squash seeds germinate best when the soil temperature is at least 70 degrees. GETTY IMAGES

Unlike quick growing squash plants, tomatoes, eggplants and pepper plants are slow-growing and take many weeks to reach the stage where you can plant them out in the garden.

But like squash, cucumbers and corn grow quickly and are easier to start from seed.

The next few weeks, late April into early May are a crucial time (when the soil warms to at least 60 degrees) to plant many vegetables, including beans, beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, lettuce, carrots and cauliflower. But be forewarned – beans will not tolerate any frost and may have to be planted again if the temperature goes below freezing.

Keep in mind that you may have to protect things if a hard freeze is forecast. Just because a crop has germinated and is starting to grow doesn't mean it can't be knocked back by a late frost.

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Cottages

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up on the story as well as religious publications.

And she's heard from many people from the community.

"Since then it's been all positive," McCauley said. "I have not heard one negative comment."

But there has been vocal criticism of the plan.

Though no one debates there is a

homeless problem in Silverton, the plan of putting homeless women in pods with no power or water – though they would have access to a kitchen in the church – hasn't been universally accepted.

"That whole neighborhood, there are only three households that are in favor in the neighborhood," said Silverton resident Kimberlee McDermott. "The other people in the neighborhood are against it."

"And it isn't being against trying to help the women or the men or whatever they want to do. It's the boxes in the

parking lot."

There are many steps between the first community meeting and homeless women occupying small cottages in the parking lot of St. Edward's.

Among those would be a change of the city's building code. The Planning Commission and Community Development Director Jason Gottgetreu have been working on the language, but any change would have to be approved by the city council.

The next Silverton City Council meeting takes place May 7 at the Silverton Community Center.

There is no time table in place for when the pods would be built and populated.

"Obviously we're hoping sooner rather than later," McCauley said. "We wouldn't proceed if this wasn't supported by the community."

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Group

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Silverton Rotaract's members are a mix of young professionals, but having a fulltime career is not required for membership nor is an official invitation, as it typically is for Silverton's 82-year-old Rotary Club, Sutton said.

Rather, Rotaract is open to anyone who wants to plug in and better the community.

"We love new opinions and new faces," she said. "The more people come, the more we can get done."

The club's goal for the fiscal year ending in June 2019 is to have 30 members and to raise the \$5,000 needed to fund its scholarship and outreach efforts.

"Now that we're on our own, we want to see what we're capable of doing, and of bringing in," Martin said. "The strength is in our members. We have a pretty cool group here, and we're just going to get stronger."

These founders of Rotaract see their

new club as a means to personal growth too. They know they're young – they celebrate that fact – so their slate of speakers so far has covered topics they wish they knew more about: savings, home loans, public safety and local charity efforts.

"We come here to learn how to be adults too," Sutton said, grinning.

"We're kind-of trying to be proactive, rather than reactive," Martin added.

On the table at every meeting, Rotaract has a large glass "swear jar," just another way members end up donating to the club's local and international causes – via slips of the tongue. Three months into meetings, the jar is about ¼ full, end everybody laughs about it.

Clearly, the journey to growing up and becoming more professional is more fun when shared with friends.

"Each of us has a different story and bring different ideas, which is how it's supposed to be," Schurter said.

The club meets upstairs at Main Street Bistro, at 201 E. Main Street, on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month. Meetings start just after 6 p.m.

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