

# Growing Your Own Food at Home in Salisbury Series

## Pack D Notes 8 GROWING CUCURBITS



### Types of cucurbits

The cucurbit family are some of summer ripening vegetables that are actually fruit and include pumpkins, squash, cucumbers, melons and gourds. These are all summer fruiting vines and so like the same conditions and fertilisers as the Solanums – tomatoes, eggplants, capsicums. As vines they will spread so you have to plan for this. Either by providing a trellis or other structure for them to grow up onto, or the space in your garden for them to extend into.

### Site selection

They will need at least 6 hours of sunlight, preferably morning sun and shelter from strong winds and western sun after 3pm. Orient your beds to maximise sunlight.

### Preparing the soil

Cucurbits prefer a pH range of 6.5 - 7. They are heavy feeders and have long growing season, so add plenty of well decomposed compost to the soil, and sulphate of potash to help flower set to fruit.

### Planting

They are all best planted from seed once the weather has warmed up -often mid-October. Select healthy seeds (soak hard pumpkin and water melons seeds over night to hasten germination). Plant seed 1-2 cm deep, water well. Plant a few seeds and select the healthiest seedling and snap off the rest.

Young seedlings are very tasty and often eaten to the ground. Once planted, we cover our seeds with the top half of a transparent plastic bottle to keep the slaters, slugs, snails away. Birds may also scratch the seeds so a few sticks around can help you identify where the seeds are and prevent cats and birds from disturbing the seeds.

The flowers are pollinated by bees – plant other flowering plants to attract them.

### Supports

They are rambling plants and can be trained up a trellis either well supported in the ground or fixed to a fence. Make sure the fence will not get too hot.

### Watering

Deep water weekly, or more frequently in summer. Test the soils for moisture first. During heat waves the leaves may wilt but don't water in the heat of the day, wait until morning or evening.

### Mulch

Once the seedlings are established add a light mulch -pea straw, sugar cane of similar. As the summer heat progresses add thicken the mulch. Keep it away from the stems and check regularly for slugs and snails that will harbor in the mulch.

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### Fertilising

Too much nitrogen will cause leafy growth and bitter fruit. The secret is to add potassium (K) either in a complete fertiliser for fruit (Gyganic or Citrus Fertiliser) or as sulphate of potash if you use Dynamic Lifter/Rapid Raiser pellets. Sprinkle 2-3 teaspoons of sulphate of potash per plant every 2 months and water in well.

### Pruning

Cut back the tips of they are rambling too far. For pumpkin, water melons, and gourds in late summer when they may still be flowering and the fruit will not have time to ripen, cut back new growth shoots, flowers and young fruit so plant can concentrate resources to ripening existing fruit.

### Harvesting

Harvest cucumbers, zucchini and squash as they ripen, which will encourage new fruit to grow. Leave pumpkin and watermelon until the tendrils have dried out, and when tapped with your knuckle sound hollow. Cut off at stem leaving enough as a 'handle' to help them store longer.

### Pest and disease control

Slugs and snails will be a problem for young plants. Put out beer or yeast traps.

They are prone to powdery mildew. Water from below and keep airflow around.

### Cucumbers

- Grow on trellis/wire mesh
- Space plants 40-80 cm
- Crop in 8-10 weeks
- Keep harvesting to encourage more fruit
- Harvest before mature
- Many varieties bitter when mature, or this could be too much Nitrogen
- A drip system under the mulch help prevent powder mildew fungal infection



### Melons

- Grow on trellis/wire mesh
- Space plants 80-120 cm
- Crop in 14-18 weeks
- Harvest when mature
- Melon comes off with a light twist
- Small watermelon are good for Adelaide's heat



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### Pumpkins

- Need space
- Plant seeds in shallow mounds
- Stake in mound for watering point
- Can grow over fence or up trees



### Squash/Zucchini

- Plant seeds in mound
- Plan for spread 2-3 metres, they ramble
- Don't wet leaves when watering
- Harvest young fruit continuously
- Three plants per family?



Tromboncino (cross between a trombone and a zucchini) with tigerella and zebra tomatoes because summer vegetable growing is fun!

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