



Winter Squash Harvest and Storage

Your winter squash may look ready on the vine, but how can you tell when to harvest them? Winter squash can be harvested when they've achieved the color, size, and shape that you're expecting from the variety. If you're planning to store them, though, leave them on the vine until the plants begin to die back, and the skins are very tough.



Tuffy acorn squash from Johnny's Selected Seeds.

Here are a few more tips for how and when to harvest:

- Check to see if winter squash are ready to harvest by pushing your thumbnail against one. If it leaves a dent, wait longer to harvest.
- Cure the squash in the garden after harvesting them, by leaving them exposed to the sun for 5-7 days. If frost or rain is likely, cover with a tarp.
- To cure inside (if rodent damage or theft is likely outdoors), keep squash in a warm, dry, sunny place for several days.
- Harvest winter squash before a heavy frost. If the frost is early and your crop is late, protect the plants and fruits with row cover, a tarp, or straw.
- Winter squash can stand a couple of light frosts, but run the risk of shortened storage time.
- Cut winter squash from the vine rather than pulling them, to avoid damaging the stem.
- Leave a couple inches of stem attached to the fruit, and handle the squash gently, to avoid damaging them. Any nicks or dents can open the fruit to pathogens and cause them to rot more quickly in storage.



Butternut Squash from Johnny's Selected Seeds.

Keep cured squash in a cool (around 50 degrees, not colder), dry, dark place. Expected storage times for squash:

- Acorn: 2-3 months
- Spaghetti: 3 months
- Delicata, Buttercup, and Sweet Dumpling: 4 months
- Kabocha: 4-6 months
- Butternut and Hubbard: 6 months or more



Sweet Dumpling squash from Johnny's Selected Seeds.

Some squash get sweeter after a few weeks of storage! These varieties include: Buttercup, Kabocha, Butternut, and Hubbard.

Johnny's Selected Seeds recommends eating the smaller squash first for best flavor and storage, and saving the large ones for last.