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Analytical

Home Storage of Pumpkins and Squashes

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All pumpkins and hard-shelled winter squashes usually cannot be consumed at the end of the growing season, so it is desirable to keep some of these vegetables in good condition until Christmas and beyond. This is possible if a few recommendations are kept in mind.

Most varieties of pumpkins cannot be stored as long as squashes. Such varieties as Jack O'Lantern and Connecticut Field will not stay in usable condition for more than two or three months. Table Queen squash can be stored for three to six months, but it becomes stringy after long storage. Hubbard, Sweetheart, Silver Bell, and Turban types of squashes store well. Butternut can be stored for two to three months.

Harvesting

Before frosts occur, harvest all the mature and immature squashes and pumpkins of usable size. Remove the stems completely to prevent stem end infection. Handle with care to avoid injuring the fruit. Clean cuts and scratches in the skin usually heal without decay, but bruises do not.

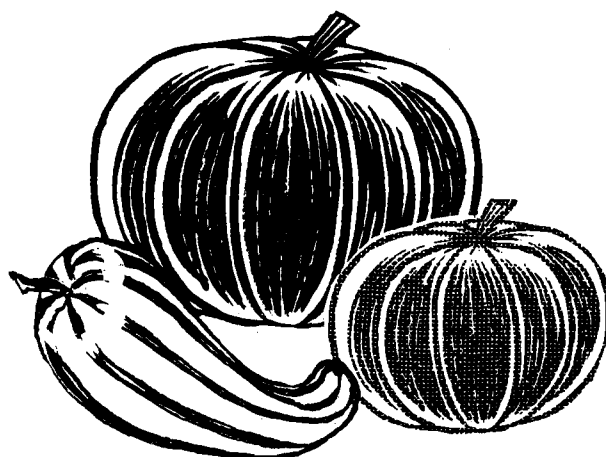
Curing

In the case of pumpkins and squashes, "curing" refers to a short period favorable for healing of cuts and scratches. Formation of protective corky layers over injuries takes place most rapidly at warm temperatures and a high humidity. Ten days at a temperature of 80° to 85° F, with a relative humidity of about 80 to 85%, is ideal. These conditions can be created in a small enclosure, such as a cabinet or closet, or possibly in a temporary container made of clear plastic. Provide heat with a thermostatically controlled electric heater. It is beneficial to equip the heater with a fan to maintain uniform distribution of the heat.

Storing

Pumpkins and squashes deteriorate rapidly if stored at temperatures below 50° F. The best storage temperature should average between 50° and 55° F. At lower temperatures there is chilling injury; at higher temperatures, shrinkage. A moderate relative humidity of about 75% is satisfactory. One of the most important things during storage is to keep the surface of the fruit dry so as to retard the growth of decay fungi. Circulating air helps to prevent moisture on the pumpkins and squashes from becoming a problem.

Any dry place where the proper temperature can be maintained is suitable for storage. Pumpkins and squashes keep best when not piled on top of each other. The preferred method is to provide shelves where they can be placed in a single layer with a small space between the fruits. Do not try to store pumpkins and squashes on a cold concrete floor. Promptly discard any that show signs of decay.



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