

A Guide to Growing & Cooking Marrows and Courgettes (Cucurbita pepo)

Contributed by Bernie

Bernie's guide to marrows, summer squash, and courgettes, and how to make the most of a prolific crop.

Marrows are also known as vegetable marrows or summer squashes and courgettes are often called zucchini especially in the US, Canada and Australia and also known in the UK as Italian squash – Courgettes are merely marrows harvested young although only tender skinned cultivars are suitable for growing as courgettes.

How and when to grow them?

Courgettes and marrows are fairly easy to grow and can be raised from seed sown directly where they are to grow or from plants grown in pots inside a greenhouse, on a windowsill or in a cold frame before being planted out.

For the best varieties buy your seed from a supplier rather than saving your own. This way you can be sure the seeds are virus free and that they will come true.

Early sowing indoors or out is rarely of much benefit as the seeds may not germinate if the soil is too cold, or cold temperatures may damage young plants. Four weeks before the last frost is expected is about right.

If plot space is short – courgettes can easily be grown two plants to a grow bag or in large pots (look for non-trailing varieties) or train trailing varieties up supports.

What variety to grow?

Marrow 'All Green Bush' - A marrow variety featuring large fruits of dark green skin and slight speckling.

Marrow ‘Custard White’ - A patty pan type with flat creamy white circular fruit with a scalloped edge. Excellent flavour.

Marrow ‘Long Green Trailing’ - This variety needs plenty of room to grow. Dark green with pale stripes.

Courgette 'Gold Rush' - A brilliant gold yellow fruited variety that produces good yields of long fruits.

Courgette ‘Ambassador’ - One of the most versatile varieties as the smooth, dark glossy skinned fruits have excellent flavour

Courgette ‘Eight Ball’- This round courgette with dark green skin is both heavy cropping and delicious cooked or raw in salads. Try stuffing some with a savoury filling. A compact grower, good for small gardens.

Pests and diseases

- Slugs may see off young, newly planted plantlets
- Cucumber Mosaic Virus - A virus distributed worldwide, affecting most cucurbits. It makes plants stunted, and fruits are covered with bumpy protrusions. The best way to avoid it is to choose resistant varieties.
- Pollen beetles – these beetles are attracted to the flowers of courgettes and squashes but do not do any damage – worthwhile being aware of their existence if you wish to eat the delicious courgette flowers – just check over flower carefully for the little black beetles

Harvesting

Courgettes should be cut when they are about 10cm (4in) long with a short stalk but are best used fresh or at the most a couple of days after harvesting. The fruits are easily bruised so handle them carefully and should always be harvested using a knife to lessen damage to the plant. Regular harvesting will encourage more fruits.

Marrows can be harvested seven to eight weeks after planting. The general rule of thumb with marrows is that if your thumbnail cannot easily go into the skin then they are past their best. The good news with marrows is that many varieties can be stored for a few weeks after harvesting in a well-ventilated place.

Growing Tips

- Marrows and courgettes are generally insect-pollinated but in cold seasons if the fruits are not setting it may be necessary to hand pollinate. The plants have both male and female flowers (the female flowers are easily identified by

the embryonic fruit behind the petals.) To hand pollinate, remove a male flower from the plant and remove all of its petals – then press it against the inside of the female flower. Alternatively use a fine paintbrush to transfer pollen from the male flower to the female flower.

- Plenty of water is essential, particularly once the plants are in flower and then when the fruits have started to swell. In hot, dry weather, plants may need as much as ten litres (two gallons) of water a week. Mulching will help to retain moisture.

- On heavy fertile soil, plenty of manure before sowing or planting makes additional feeding unnecessary, although some say too much food can give lush foliage but less crop.

- On very sandy or light soils, regular applications of a liquid feed will help to boost production.

- Water, water and more water - Plenty of water is essential, particularly once the plants are in flower and when the fruits have started to develop. In hot, dry weather, plants may need as much as ten litres (two gallons) of water a week.

Mulching will help to retain moisture but I have also had great success in growing courgettes in grow bags which are then placed into a grow bag tray which can then easily be filled with water.

What to do with the inevitable glut?

Courgette Loaf (submitted by jocorless)

This loaf cake is an unusual way to use courgettes and makes a great snack, teatime treat or even an unusual breakfast. It can be eaten straight from the fridge, or toasted, and is extra delicious with a generous spreading of butter.

Ingredients

3 eggs

275ml/9fl oz sunflower oil

350g/12oz caster sugar

350g/12oz courgettes (or small marrows), grated

165g/5&oz plain flour

165g/5&oz buckwheat flour

1 tsp baking powder

2tsp bicarbonate of soda

1 tbsp ground cinnamon

175g/6oz raisins

150g/5oz walnuts, chopped

Makes 2 x 900g/2lb loaves

Method

1. Preheat the oven to 180C/350F/Gas 4. Grease and base line two 900g/2lb loaf tins with greased greaseproof paper.

2. Measure all the ingredients into a large bowl and mix well to make a thick batter. Pour into the prepared tins.

3. Bake in the preheated oven for about one hour or until the loaves are firm and a fine skewer inserted into the centre comes out clean. Cool the cakes a little before turning out and leaving to cool completely on a wire rack.

4. Store in the fridge and use within a week or freeze and defrost when needed.

Herby Courgette Couscous (submitted by Fee)

Ingredients

- Couscous

- 1 Courgette

- Big handful of fresh parsley

- Big handful of fresh mint

- Small knob of butter or some olive oil

- 1 small onion, roughly chopped

- 1 clove of garlic

Method:

1. Make the couscous as normal.

2. While that's soaking, rip the herbs up into little bits and chop the courgette into 1cm pieces.

3. Fry the courgette with the onion and garlic until starting to brown, then remove from heat.

4. When the couscous is done, add the rest of the ingredients and mix well.

Option: I sometimes mix just the raw courgette and herbs to cooked couscous, along with a knob of butter, but you have to be a fan of al dente courgette, as it just heats through and still has that soft crunch.

Courgette Bhajiis (submitted by Judith)

Grate some courgettes, skin and all. Put in a colander, sprinkle with salt and leave for half an hour. Rinse of the salt and squeeze the grated courgette in your hands to get rid of as much water as possible.

Mix grated courgette with some gram flour, coriander and whatever other spices take your fancy. Roll the mix into balls and deep fry until crisp and golden (or make patties and shallow fry). Serve with a mild, coconut curry sauce. (If this doesn't hold together well, add an egg and try again!)

Courgette, Potato and Onion Tortilla (submitted by Bernie)

Ingredients

12oz salad potatoes
7 tbsp olive oil
3 med or 2 large cut into half inch slices
1 large Spanish onion, peeled and finely sliced
1 rounded teaspoon chopped thyme
8 large free-range eggs
salt & pepper

Method

1. Finely slice the potatoes, rinse thoroughly to remove starch and dry on some kitchen paper
 2. Heat a wok with 3 tbsp of the olive oil and stir fry the courgette slices until lightly browned
 3. Remove with a slotted spoon, add another 3 tbsp oil and fry the potato slices until lightly browned, then turn the heat down and cover and cook for another 10-15 mins until potatoes are tender
 4. Remove potatoes from pan and add more oil if needed, then fry the onion slices until soft and beginning to brown
 5. Add the thyme and return the courgettes and potatoes to the pan and season
 6. Lightly beat the eggs then tip the vegetables in and mix well
 7. Heat a frying pan until moderately hot, add a little oil, then pour in the egg mixture
 8. Turn down the heat and cook for 5 mins while the grill is being pre-heated
 9. Slip the pan under the grill about 5 inches from the heat until the top is puffed up and brown and the egg mixture is set
- Leave to cool in the pan slightly, then cut into wedges and serve with a green salad

Additional Tips

I have also added a couple of ounces of Parmesan to the egg mixture
Great to take on picnics

Courgette & Bacon Muffins (submitted by Bernie)

6 rashers of bacon finely chopped
8 oz SR Flour
1/4 tsp salt
freshly ground pepper
1 tsp mustard
2 oz softened
2 courgettes grated
3 oz mature cheddar (plus extra for the topping)
2 medium eggs
6 floz milk

Sieve the dry ingredients. Rub in the butter and add the courgettes, bacon and cheese. Lightly beat the milk and eggs and stir into the dry mixture.

Spoon into well greased muffin tins to make 12 deep or 24 shallow or 48 mini (very good as nibbles at a party) muffin tins. Sprinkle a little extra cheese on each one.

Bake at 200c/400f or gas 6 until light brown. (about 25 mins)

Marrow and Red Tomato Chutney (submitted by Gil)

Here's one to make when you do have a glut of ripe, red tomatoes

Ingredients:

1lb marrow (weight after peeling and removing seeds)
1lb ripe tomatoes
8oz onions
1 clove garlic
8oz sultanas
1 tablespoon pickling spice
1 teaspoon ground ginger
6oz white sugar
6oz brown sugar
½ pint malt vinegar

[2 teaspoons salt] - optional

Method

1. Set jars to warm in low oven
2. Cut marrow into small cubes, skin tomatoes and chop roughly, peel and chop onion finely, crush garlic
3. Tie pickling spice up in muslin
4. Put all ingredients in pan, stir over low heat till sugar has dissolved.
5. Simmer, stirring, until mixture is thick (about 1 hour)
6. Pot into jars, lid, cool and label.

Yield : about 4lb

Marrow & Ginger Jam (submitted by Bernie)

Ingredients

2lb 4oz prepared marrow (or marrow size courgette!!)
 quarter pint water
 2oz root ginger
 3lb 4oz white sugar
 1 lemon
 4oz crystallized ginger
 1 bottle pectin

Peel, seed, dice and weigh the marrow and leave overnight.

Place the marrow into large preserving pan with the water. Add the bruised root ginger tied into a muslin bag; cover and simmer for 20 mins. Chop the crystallized ginger and add it to the pan with the juice from the lemon and the warmed sugar, stirring well until the sugar has dissolved. Bring to a full boil for 2 mins then remove the pan from the heat and discard the muslin bag. Stir in the pectin and continue to skim and stir for 1 minute, allow to cool before potting. Seal when cold.

Makes approx 10lb.

Chorizo & Pepper Marrow (submitted by Bernie)

Ingredients

1 large marrow, peeled
 100g/3oz couscous
 1 lemon, juice only
 2 tbsp olive oil
 1 red onion, finely sliced
 100g/3oz chorizo, cut into small chunks
 1 roasted red pepper, finely sliced
 2 vine ripened tomatoes, seeded and chopped
 1 tbsp parsley, roughly chopped
 1 tbsp mint, roughly chopped
 1 tbsp coriander, roughly chopped
 salt and freshly ground black pepper

Method

1. Preheat an oven to 200C/390F/Gas 6.
2. Slice the marrow lengthways and scoop out all the seeds, then place on a roasting tray.
3. Place the couscous in a bowl along with the lemon juice and enough boiling water to cover.
4. Cover with cling film and allow to soak for five minutes.
5. Meanwhile, heat a frying pan until hot then add the olive oil. Add the red onion and stir-fry for 3-4 minutes until just softened. Add the chorizo and fry for a further two minutes until just crisped and the juices are released. Add to the couscous, along with the pepper, tomatoes and herbs.
6. Mix well and season to taste with salt and black pepper. Spoon into the centre of the two marrow halves.
7. Place in the oven for 20 minutes and cook until piping hot and the marrow is just tender.
8. To check if the marrow is done, place the tip of a knife into the side, if it offers just a little resistance it is done.

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