

Pumpkin, Naked-Seeded—*Cucurbita pepo* L.¹

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Varieties of naked-seeded pumpkin, also called squash, are available from major seed company catalogs for planting in Florida gardens. The naked-seeded pumpkin has been derived from natural mutants whose seed coats were very thin in contrast to the thick, hard, and close-fitting hulls of normal pumpkin seeds. Since pumpkin hulls are in close contact with the meat (cotyledons and primary axis) of the seed, they cannot be removed easily by the methods used for dehulling sunflower seed.

Even with the seed coat, pumpkinseed for food use has been fairly popular for many years, particularly with natural food enthusiasts and self-sufficient gardeners. Perhaps the Indian word for squash, askutasquash, which means “eaten raw or uncooked,” is derived from the use of raw seeds rather than the pulp.

The flesh of wild *Cucurbita* species is reported to be so bitter that it is inedible, so seeds were likely to have been the first parts eaten. Today most people like the flavor of pumpkin seeds, and with the naked-seeded varieties, pumpkinseed should become even more popular as a food item.

According to the Department of Agronomy at the University of Minnesota, naked-seeded pumpkins have been tested there since 1964 as a potential oilseed crop. However, it was not until the release of ‘Lady Godiva’ by the USDA in 1972 that there was a popular variety available through national seed companies for grower use. Description of this and other varieties follows.



Figure 1. Naked pumpkin seed
Credits: Blue Goose, Inc.

Description

Fruit of ‘Lady Godiva’ weigh 5 pounds and are yellow with green stripes at maturity (the green fades as a sign of overmaturity). The pale flesh can be sliced and eaten raw, but it is stringy when cooked. The green seed is about three times the size of a dehulled sunflower seed. A bushel of seed weighs about 43 pounds. The long, prostrate vine runners reach 10–20 feet in length.

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'Triple Treat' is suggested for jack o'lanterns, cooking, and naked-seed eating. The deep orange flesh is of good cooking quality. However, the fibrous hulls are noticeable when the seed is eaten (unlike 'Lady Godiva'). Fruits weigh about 5 pounds and are golden orange in color.

The orange fruit of 'Streaker' are suitable for jack o'lanterns, cooking, and naked-seed eating. Some other varieties are 'Eat All,' 'Sweetnut,' and 'Hull-less.'

Culture

Naked-seeded pumpkins should be grown in a manner similar to other types of vining pumpkins and winter squashes. In Florida this means spring planting throughout the state, and fall and early winter planting in South Florida. Because of the absence of a protective seed coat, it is important to treat the seed with a fungicide and plant it shallowly (1 inch deep). Space plants 24-30 inches apart in 36-inch rows. Like all pumpkins, there are male and female flowers on each plant; bees are required for pollination.

Gardeners growing naked-seeded varieties do not need to worry about isolating these plants from other squash or pumpkins to prevent cross-pollinating. Although crosses will occur, the seed will not have a tough seed coat since it is formed from maternal tissue. Of course, such crossed seed should not be saved for planting, as the next generation will result in seed with regular seed coats.

USE

Seeds may be removed by cutting open the fruit and scraping out by hand. Seeds should be cleaned by rinsing and then drying on a screen or in the oven.

The seed, which contains 38% protein, can be eaten raw, roasted dry, or roasted in oil. When dry roasted at about 350°F, the seeds make a popping noise and swell but do not explode like popcorn. Oven roasting takes about 15 minutes.