

# WINTER SQUASH

Scientific Name: *Curbita maxima*

Dakota Name: Wagmu

Ojibwe Name: Okosimaan

Common Names: Winter Squash, Pumpkin, Lakota Squash

## INTRODUCTION

Dakota and Ojibwe peoples have cultivated unique varieties of squash for millennia. These squashes come in different shapes, sizes, and colors, often with thick skins and sweet, rich flesh that is usually orange, yellow, white, or green in color. *Cucurbita maxima* varieties include traditional long-storing winter squashes like the Lakota Squash and GeteOkosimaan. They are highly valued as a staple food for their flesh and their seeds, and are an important part of Indigenous agricultural traditions.

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## ECOLOGY

Winter squashes thrive in open fields and gardens with full sunlight and well-drained soil. They are traditionally planted in mounds, often alongside corn and beans in a system known as the Three Sisters. Their broad leaves help shade the soil, keeping it moist and preventing the growth of weeds. Bees and other pollinators play a crucial role in fertilizing the flowers.



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## HISTORY

The Dakota and Ojibwe peoples have cultivated squash forever, selecting and saving seeds to ensure strong, productive plants. These squash varieties were central to survival, providing food throughout the year. When European settlers arrived, they quickly adopted Indigenous squash varieties, but the traditional growing, harvesting, and cooking methods remain deeply rooted in Dakota and Ojibwe cultures. Today, Indigenous seed keepers continue to preserve these squash varieties, ensuring their survival for future generations.



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## TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Squash is one of the “Three Sisters,” a sacred trio of crops grown together by many Indigenous peoples. This planting method has been proven extremely effective and is honored in ceremonies and harvest traditions. Squash is highly nutritious, providing vitamins, fiber, and energy. Some traditional uses include using squash to support digestion and nourishment during the winter months.

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## FORAGING AND HARVESTING




Winter squashes are harvested in late summer or early fall when the skin hardens, signaling maturity. The Dakota and Ojibwe peoples traditionally harvest squash by cutting them from the vine and allowing them to cure for longer storage. Squash blossoms can also be gathered and eaten before the fruit fully develops.

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## PRESERVATION



Squash can be stored whole in a cool, dry place for several months. Traditionally, Dakota and Ojibwe peoples sliced squash into rings and dried them in the sun for long-term storage. Dried squash can be rehydrated in soups or eaten as a snack, or it can be ground into flour. The seeds are also dried and saved for future planting or roasted for food.

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## CULINARY USES

Winter Squash is roasted, boiled, or mashed and used in soups, stews, and breads. The seeds are eaten raw or roasted, and the blossoms can be stuffed and cooked. The blossoms may also be dried and ground into a delicious seasoning. The flesh of winter squash may also be dried and ground in to flour or stored for later.

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## COMMON THREATS

Pests such as squash bugs and vine borers can affect squash plants. Indigenous gardening techniques, such as interplanting with corn and beans or using companion plants like sunflowers, help protect squash from pests naturally. Hand-picking pests and rotating crops also help keep plants healthy.

