

Zucchini

(*Curcubita pepo*)

M. Poffley* and G. Owens, Senior Extension Officer, Crops, Forestry and Horticulture, Darwin

* Formerly DPIFM

SOWING

Zucchini can be grown throughout the year. However, during the wet season, a regular spray program is essential to control mildews and insects. Fruit produced during this period is of a lower quality. Due to its erect bushy habit, zucchini does not occupy as much space in the garden as do other cucurbits. Three or four plants should provide an average family with zucchinis over a period of several weeks. Two to three seeds should be sown directly into the soil at each site, about 3-5 cm deep, allowing 60 cm between plants in a row and 1.5 m between rows. When the seedlings reach the two-leaf stage, remove those that appear weak and leave the strongest at each site. During the wet season, plant zucchini on ridges or hills to facilitate drainage. Male and female flowers, though separate, are borne on the same plant (see Agnote D3, No.366: Rockmelons).

FERTILISER

Liming the soil at 200-300 g/m² a few weeks before planting can be beneficial. Zucchini is a heavy feeder and responds to compost or well rotted animal manure dug into the soil at about 2 kg/m². A complete fertiliser mix should be broadcast along the row and incorporated into the soil at 70 g/m² prior to planting. Regular side dressing with a 50:50 mix of urea and potassium sulphate at 20 g/m² starting at flowering will keep plants vigorous and productive. Plants should be irrigated immediately after the side-dressing has been applied.



WATERING

Water requirements are high and it is essential to keep the soil moist during hot weather and when fruit is filling out. Failure to do so will often result in the shedding of partly formed fruit.

HARVESTING

When the fruits reach about 10-15 cm in length, they are ready for picking - usually within five to six weeks of planting. To avoid injury to the plant it is advisable to cut the fruit off with a sharp knife, leaving about 1 cm of stalk. Picking should be done regularly, at least every two to three days as the fruits develop very quickly. In hot weather it may be necessary to pick daily. If allowed to mature on the bush, flowering and fruit set ceases.

PESTS AND DISEASES

Zucchini can be infected by downy and powdery mildew which can be controlled with appropriate fungicides. Zucchini can be affected by a number of viruses. Virus infected plants should be removed immediately and destroyed to prevent the virus spreading.

Aphids, pumpkin beetles and caterpillars are the major insect pests of zucchini and can be controlled with appropriate insecticides.

For information on insect control, please refer to the DPIFM Entomology website at <http://pestinfo.nt.gov.au/>

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