Zucchini, a member of the summer squash family of cucurbits (*Cucurbita pepo*), owes its name to the Italian word for a small pumpkin or squash, *zucchina*. Historians believe squash was first grown in Central and South America, then taken to Europe where Italians more fully developed summer cultivars such as zucchini. It is also called *courgette*, a variation of the French word *courge*, meaning squash, or referred to as a ‘marrow’ vegetable in Britain. Widely considered a vegetable, botanically, zucchini is a fruit. Many dishes include use of both the squash (raw or cooked) and its delicate flower (frequently battered and fried).

Although zucchini can grow up to several feet in length, most is harvested and consumed while immature, before the hardening of seeds and rinds, and a corresponding loss of flavor and quality. In South Africa, zucchini is mostly grown and harvested as a baby vegetable, called baby marrow.

Generally the most popular of the summer squashes, demand for zucchini has grown steadily in the last decade. It can be grown nearly anywhere with consistently warm summer temperatures. To keep up with demand, the United States is the world’s top importer, sourcing primarily from Mexico.

References: University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, University of Florida/IFAS Extension, University of Illinois Extension

### SEASONAL AVAILABILITY

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References: New York Dept. of Agriculture, Oregon State University, University of Florida/IFAS Extension, University of Illinois Extension, University of Wisconsin Extension.
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TYPES, VARIETIES & CUTS

Color ranges from light green to very dark, almost black-green, can be striped or speckled and is usually smooth, straight, and cylindrical with a glossy surface. Other variations include golden or white zucchini (though the latter is often considered a mutation), and rounder, ball-shaped varieties.

Average size ranges from 5 to 6 inches for shorter varieties (for example, Caserta) to well over a foot for longer types like Cocozelle. Most are harvested in the 7 to 8-inch range.

Baby fingerling zucchini, as its name suggests, is picked when only a few inches long.

Among the many varieties and hybrids are Ambassador, Aristocrat, Black Beauty, Blacknini, Classic, Eight Ball, Elite, Gold Rush, Greenbay, Mexican Globe, Payload, Seneca, Senator, Spineless Beauty, and Tigress.

References: North Carolina Cooperative Extension, University of Georgia, University of Illinois Extension, University of Wisconsin Extension.

PESTS & DISEASE

Common Diseases:
A lack of calcium will cause blossom end rot, the formation of watery, black bloating at the ends of fruit, most commonly found in tomatoes. Angular leaf spot is a bacterial disease that can affect zucchini, cucumbers, and honeydew melons.

Phytophthora blight is a fungal disease that can decimate zucchini and other cucurbits, destroying entire fields. Mosaic viruses and mildew (powdery and downy) can appear on zucchini leaves. Given the faint, green-grey markings of mature zucchini leaves, these splotches and streaks can be mistaken for mildew, but are normal.

Common Pests:
Among damaging pests are cucumber beetles, which will attack seedlings, vines, and growing gourds. The aptly named squash bugs damage vines, attacking the maturing zucchini in large herds. Squash vine borers are an annual nuisance for pumpkins and squash, due to overwintering in the soil. They are a greater problem for winter squash, but can also damage summer varieties like zucchini when larvae bore into vines and cause wilt, by preventing the travel of moisture through the plant. Symptoms are often mistakenly attributed to bacterial or fusarium wilt, but can be confirmed if holes are found at the base of wilted leaves.

Other pests include aphids, cutworms, leafminers, mites, mole crickets and whiteflies; most can be controlled with pesticides.

References: University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, University of Florida/IFAS Extension, University of Wisconsin Extension, UC Davis Integrated Pest Management.

CULTIVATION, STORAGE & PACKAGING

Preharvest:
Zucchini grows rapidly in temperate climates with full sun and loamy soil, producing both male and female flowers (though only the females produce fruit). Overly plentiful male flowers should be culled every few days, and mature zucchini left on the vine will prevent additional fruit from growing.

Most fruit grows within a week of flowering; for optimum tenderness, pick at 6 to 8 inches in length, with a diameter of 3 to 4 inches. Look for thin, wrinkleless skin with no soft spots.

Postharvest:
Care should be taken in handling immature zucchini, as the fruit is prone to bruising and scratches. Surrounding leafstalks and stems are prickly and will irritate unprotected skin.

Since it is harvested when immature, zucchini is not ideal for lengthy storage. This summer squash will lose its moisture and deteriorate quickly; however, it can be stored for a few days from 41 and 50°F with high humidity. It does not ripen after harvest and can be mildly sensitive to ethylene.

References: University of California-Davis Postharvest Technology website, University of Illinois Extension, University of Wisconsin Extension, USDA.
GOOD ARRIVAL GUIDELINES

Generally speaking, the percentage of defects shown on a timely government inspection certificate should not exceed the percentage of allowable defects, provided: (1) transportation conditions were normal; (2) the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) or Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) inspection was timely; and (3) the entire lot was inspected.

<table>
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<tr>
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There are no good arrival guidelines for this commodity specific to Canada; U.S. guidelines apply to shipments unless otherwise agreed by contract.

References: DRC, PACA, USDA.

INSPECTOR’S INSIGHTS

- There are no size requirements (i.e., minimum or maximum diameter or minimum or maximum length) in the U.S. grade standards for summer squash.
- Bruising is scored as a defect when any indentation is more than 1/8 inch in depth or exceeds an area of 1/2 inch in diameter.
- Scuffing is scored as a defect when affecting more than 10% of the surface area, or when discolored, affecting more than 5% of the surface area.
- Any amount of decay, including decay affecting the stem, is scorable against the 1% decay tolerance. A gummy substance can exude from squash, particularly from cut or broken stems. This shall not be scored as decay unless the underlying flesh is breaking down.


HEALTH & NUTRITION

As a summer squash, zucchini has less nutritive value than its winter counterparts. It is, however, very low in calories, has no fat, and provides calcium, iron, folate, potassium, and Vitamins A and C, principally from its rind. Research into squash seeds has uncovered substances that can not only promote digestive tract health, but may prove helpful in preventing certain types of cancer.

References: University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, University of Illinois Extension.