



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PIXABAY

(Left) Julie Burchstead planted three seeds underneath each of her trellis towers, same as for a traditional squash mound. (Right) Most small squash varieties will not need any additional support besides the trellis.

ASK A MASTER GARDENER TRELLIS GROWN SQUASH



Julie Burchstead
Master Gardener

Question: I love homegrown butternut squash, but despair that I will never have room to grow this favorite. Any options?

Answer: Small garden squash lovers, rejoice! Tomatoes and beans are not the only fresh delights that can be grown on a trellis. If you don't have the luxury of affording significant real estate for the sprawl of squash plants, go vertical!

As I write this, cradling a mug of hot coffee, watching the cold April rain growing ever closer to snow, I am thinking my heart is better warmed by a memory of last summer's garden than the deceiving turn of the calendar.

I lay flat on my back, afternoon sun filtering through broad leaves woven through three metal towers, each hanging with the rubenesque orbs of butternut, hubbard and delicata. (Squash, that is.) And just a few weeks later, I harvested a bounty that my family enjoyed until it finally ran out in late winter.

Tiny yards can be high yield performers when we maximize every inch and sometimes that means re-thinking traditional where and how. That might mean repurposing front or side yard space, areas traditionally planted solely with lawn and ornamentals, for food production.

In my case it meant that and also going up! Digging up lawn and making veggie beds out of my side yard was an easy decision. But heavy squash on a trellis? As I tucked in my young plants last spring, I wasn't sure it would work.

I was somewhat reassured by the many videos and articles I found. But some things you just have to see for yourself. I assembled and placed



PHOTO COURTESY OF JULIE BURCHSTEAD

Julie Burchstead wove her growing squash plants through metal towers and loosely secured vines with cotton string similar to how she grows tomatoes.

my towers, then planted three seeds underneath each one, same as for a traditional squash mound.

As the plants began to reach, I trained them to each tower, weaving them in and out of the supports, loosely tying vines with cotton string, as I do with my tomatoes. Once they latched on with their tendrils, they never looked back, only an occasional wild vine requiring some taming.

Debra Graff, author of Vertical Vegetable Gardening, suggests thinning seedlings to only one – the most vigorous will increase yield. I plan to

try that this year.

I chose metal towers 5 feet high and 12 inches in diameter for their visual appeal, light weight and strength. A bit larger would be even better. You can also make your own from hog panels and T-posts, wood or even bent green willow. Just make sure your choice is sturdy, yet light enough to move easily when you rotate your crops next spring.

As it turns out, using a trellis for squash plants is not really a new idea. In researching for this article, I learned Seminole gardeners

historically planted their squash at the base of trees for a natural trellis.

Today, there are a myriad of videos to coach you through the growing vertical process. And now that I have grown my squash this way, even if I had the space, I am not sure I would ever go back to the sprawl.

The benefits of vertical growth are multiple. It provides more airflow (less opportunity for diseases of moisture), keeps fruit away from ground pests, makes it easier to spy them before they mature to the size of small Volkswagens and harvesting is a breeze!

My plants developed some late season powdery mildew, but that was the result of poorly timed watering while I was on vacation, something watering earlier in the day would mitigate. And my harvest was not impacted.

Unlike melons, most smaller squash varieties (Baby Blue Hubbard, Butternut, Acorn, Delicata, etc.) will not need any additional support. If there is ever a need, you can always create a sling from old pantyhose or a strip of an old t-shirt.

Wondering when to plant your squash? Check out OSU extension's Grow Your Own guide at bit.ly/3zR-JF7R to learn the best planting windows and much more.

Small space gardeners, I hope you are convinced to go pick up your favorite winter squash seeds with confidence. Small gardens can indeed be mighty!

And, sometime in late August, may we all find a quiet moment to stretch out in the leafy shade of our towers of squash, dreaming of savory fall meals to come.

"In every gardener there is a child who believes in The Seed Fairy." – Robert Breault

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 S E Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the Oregon State University Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.