**SQUASH**

by Michael Halm

Squash is an ancient cultivated crop, having been found in prehistoric sites in Mexico. The native Indians seem to have eaten the seeds. The name does not come from the racket games of the same name or vice versa. Squash is a contraction of the Narraganset *askutasquash*, which was their for this gourd.

Europeans brought it back with them after discovering it in the New World. Since then the squash has extended its tendrils around the world. The plant reproduces sexually. The male flower grows near the end of the runner; the female flower grows three or four days later on short peduncles. Fertilization is entirely dependent upon the honeybee.

Since the countless numbers of varieties freely crossbreed with each other classification is very difficult. A general distinction can be made depending upon when the gourd is harvested and how it is used.

The soft-skinned, immature summer squashes can be sliced and sauteed entire or added to soups. The white bush scallop variety is popular in the south. Other summer squashes are the zucchini and yellow crookneck.

A single plant may produce anything from one to two hundred gourds with no two alike. The varieties are therefore usually called by the obvious characteristics of color and shape.

Of the hard-skinned, mature winter squash acorn and the varieties of Hubbard squash are most popular. They are usually baked in the shell, but can also be peeled and steamed or used in casseroles or baked goods.

Although squash is grown mostly in New England, New Jersey and Florida, it is of particular interest to us that the most popular, Buttercup, was bred here in North Dakota. While experimenting with Hubbard squash at the North Dakota Agricultural Experimental Station in 1925, a new variety was noticed, a cross between Essex hybrid and Quality squash.

Over the next several years by controlling the pollination selectively with rubber bands and carefully judging of the progeny what was to become Buttercup squash was created. In 1929 three identical squash were produced. They were further judged on texture, flavor, color, sweetness and dry matter. The final winner with dry mealy texture and a sweet, rich orange flesh was released in 1931 under the present name and has proved popular ever since.

Squash are not only bred for integrity and food quality but for variety. Very much as cats and dogs are judged at pet shows, gourds are judged in art shows.

In addition to natural varieties of colors and shapes the young squash can be molded or massaged or tied into nearly any shape imaginable. Designs can be scratched in skin which will be retained in the mature fruit. At these art shows there are usually prizes given for the largest or most unusual gourd. There are also prizes for arrangements, much as in flower arranging.