

Store a little sunshine to light up winter

A feast for the eyes and the taste buds, pumpkins and squash are a lasting love for **Lia Leendertz**

I fell in love with winter squash for the shallowest of reasons. I was working in a walled vegetable garden just outside Bristol some years ago. After being picked, the squashes and pumpkins were piled into the cold frames, a several-metres-long jumble of burnt amber and yolk yellow, forest green and silver grey. Some were squat, fat, Cinderella's-carriage shaped, others bulbous and hooked, or warty and forbidding. It was beautiful. It took your breath away, and I would linger by them as often as I could while they were in there, curing in the late sun for winter storage.

Along with the essential tomato, winter squash is the vegetable that I have grown every year since, sometimes trying out different varieties, sometimes clinging to old favourites, and the act of harvesting and curing them always takes me back to those crisp, cool autumn days working in weakening sun hazy with wood smoke.

This year I am particularly pleased with my lot. Along with a single plant each of a few wild cards ('Buttercup', 'Burgess Vine' and 'Carnival'), I majored on the onion-shaped, glowing orange 'Uchiki Kuri' – a must-grow for me which always does well – and the big and beautiful silver-grey-skinned 'Queensland Blue', which I have lusted after for years but never grown: ridiculous, as it is just as easy to grow as any of the less beautiful varieties. The contrast of grey-blue skin and bright orange flesh is particularly pleasing if the visual feast is high on your priorities.

But, of course, it isn't all about looks. As well as being among the most beautiful of vegetables, winter squash are also up there with the tastiest.

The sweet, nutty, firm flesh lends itself perfectly to autumn and winter comfort food: soups, roasts and curries. And unlike other crops, you don't have to process

squash to store it. There's a reason internet forums don't ring with recipes for winter squash chutney or queries about how well it freezes: grown and cured well, squash will store just as it is into winter.

Growing tips

The hard work with winter squash is all at the beginning of the year. If you set them up well, you can almost ignore them until harvest time: I don't think I watered mine once this year beyond mid-June.

Sow seeds six weeks before the last projected frost date, and harden off seedlings carefully over a week or so before planting them out. Dig a good sized planting hole (mine were roughly 50cm/20in deep and wide) and backfill with a mixture of well-rotted manure or garden compost and soil.

Make a slight depression in the centre of the planting pit and plant into that: you want any water to pool naturally around the plant. Push a cane into the ground near the plant as you put it into the ground. It seems unnecessary at planting time when the plants are so small, but these are big, lolling plants, and you will quickly lose sight of where the roots of the plant are, making watering near impossible. They are loved by slugs when young so protect with organic slug pellets and copper rings while they get away.

Once they're past that vulnerable, slug-



CHRISTOPHER JONES

bait early stage, your work is pretty much done, bar watering during dry patches.

As the fruits mature, pop a tile or a piece of wood underneath them to lift them from the ground. Contact with wet soil can soften skin and lead to rot.

Harvesting and curing

Squash can take a light autumn frost, but nothing beyond that, so they must be harvested as the weather starts to cool. If you haven't already done this, cut a short length either side of the stem to create a little handle for carrying (see inset left) and also to improve storage. Short stems shrink right back and can create an entry point for bacteria. Once cut, squash should be "cured" for around 10 days somewhere light, bright and frost free to help them

Star players: burnt amber and yellow, forest green and silver grey, squash has pride of place in Lia's allotment. Inset left, snipping the stem of a squash at harvesting

store well into winter. I have a covered deck which is perfect, but a shed window or cold frame would do just as well.

Then they should be stored. Pretty as they look, squashes won't keep for long in a centrally heated kitchen. Leave them somewhere cool, such as a shed or cellar. There these globes of summer sunshine will stay sealed away, patiently waiting for a big, sturdy knife, some oil and a little heat to realise their delicious potential.

Where to buy seed

- Real Seeds sells early flowering and ripening varieties, particularly useful in our short and unpredictable summers (01239 821107; www.realseeds.co.uk).
- Otter Farm supplies a number of the tastiest varieties (www.otterfarmshop.co.uk).
- Simpson's Seeds has a vast range, and also supplies small plants at planting time (01985 845004; www.simpsonsseeds.co.uk).

Online

Looking for delicious squash recipes? Visit www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening for three of Lia Leendertz's favourites.

BATTERY OPERATED CANDLES

Beautiful, Unique and Flickering

Don't confuse these with tea lights or other battery operated candles with plastic flames. These are the most realistic on the market and are patented; embedded LED with REAL WICK. That's what makes these incredible and totally unique.

Now you can set your candle to turn on at a convenient time every day and it will turn itself off after 5 hours (can be turned off manually). Ideal for entertaining indoors or outside*.

These remarkable battery powered patented candles glow, flicker and feel just like the real thing, whilst releasing a fragrant aroma to add an attractive ambience to any room or garden patio without messy dripping wax and blackened walls or ceilings!

Made from real wax in a 6" round style and available in Kiwi Green or Honey with the reassuring safety element. No more worrying about the children or pets burning themselves by knocking over an ordinary lighted candle! The Everlasting Candle lasts for 350 hours on just two "AA" batteries, then change batteries for another 350 hours. (batteries sold separately) Everlasting! These Everlasting Candles will make the ideal present for friends and family. *Not waterproof



Now even more realistic with partially burned down effect

Patented Flickering Mini Candles

These beautiful candles are battery operated, 2.5" tall and available in two stylish colours; Kiwi Green and Honey.

Place them around your home and give a new meaning to the word ambience. A welcome addition to your décor; all your friends and family will want them. The 2.5" candles come in a twin pack and last for 100 hours before you have to change the CR2032 battery (similar to a watch battery). At only £4.99 for a twin pack you can't go wrong, but keep reading for our special offer. Place them around the dinner table, on the mantle piece, in the bedroom, bathroom or on the patio furniture. There are endless ways to enhance your home with them. Here is the special offer; to help you make the decision on this fabulous new size we will include the batteries FREE! Order today.



HOMGAR GUARANTEE
If you are not completely satisfied with your purchase return within 7 days for a full refund of purchase price. Goods despatched within 14 days receipt of order. Shops protection only covers the direct ordering of products advertised at the prices specified in this advertisement.

Order online & view other great products at www.homgar.com

Post to: Homgar, FREEPOST LON 12290, Borehamwood, WD6 1BR.

Item	Price	Qty	Total
6" Round Candle – KIWI GREEN	£7.99		
6" Round Candle – HONEY	£7.99		
6 Pack 6" Round Candle (save £7.95) – KIWI GREEN	£39.99		
6 Pack 6" Round Candle (save £7.95) – HONEY	£39.99		
Pack of 4 AA batteries (ie for 2 candles)	£1.99		
2.5" twin pack candle – KIWI GREEN	£4.99		
2.5" twin pack candle – HONEY	£4.99		
Grand Total			£4.99

Please add £4.99 postage to complete order

I enclose cheque (payable to Homgar) for £ _____ or charge my Mastercard/Visa/Maestro/Switch Card account

Card No _____ Security Code (last 3 digits) ___/___/___ Expiry Date ___/___/___ Issue No (Switch/Maestro) _____

Name _____ Signature _____

Address _____ Post Code _____

Tel No _____ Email Address _____

CREDIT CARD ORDERLINE: 0844 701 0055 Quote Ref DT2910 (calls charged at 10p per minute) FAX ORDERS ON: 020 8327 0488

"Yes It's True! Hardy Amaryllis Belladonna Will Thrive Outdoors!! Enjoy Fragrant Floral Displays All Autumn Long, Year After Year!!"



Not to be confused with the common indoor varieties typically grown at Christmas, hardy outdoor Amaryllis Belladonna will brighten up your garden with its tall, colourful flowers!

Simply stunning! Amaryllis Belladonna is a hardy variety which will reward you with spectacular flower-packed displays every Autumn, brightening up your garden or patio at a time when there is little else in flower. Its majestic, fragrant flower-heads consist of 8-12 individual trumpet-like blooms sitting atop tall, leafless stems. Extremely unusual, yet very easy to grow, these plants are hardy down to -7°C once established. For best results grow in a sunny spot in well drained soil. Perfect for pots and patio containers, Amaryllis Belladonna also makes excellent, long-lasting cut flowers.

- Large clusters of fragrant pink flowers
- Extremely unusual yet easy to grow
- Strong stems can reach up to 1m in height
- Hardy down to -7°C once established, grow indoors this season.
- Will flower September – October, from next year onwards
- Supplied as a pack of 5 large bulbs

AMARYLLIS BELLADONNA (5 Bulbs)
JUST £12.99 (incl. SH&I)
ITEM: 200330
SAVE £8.00!
2 Sets (10 Bulbs) ONLY £17.98 (incl. SH&I)

OUR GUARANTEE TO YOU!
"If you're not completely happy with your purchase, return it within 30 days for a FULL REFUND."

EXTRA BONUS OFFER!
10 Double Queen Hellebores - Large Ruffled Blooms, Speckled Petals, Evergreen Foliage - The Perfect Winter Flowering. Frost Hardy Plant! Plus if you order today you'll save £5 off the normal price making these fantastic value at JUST £12.99

3 EASY WAYS TO ORDER YOUR AMARYLLIS BELLADONNA:

- Visit: GardenBargains.com
- Telephone: 08719 77 55 55
- By post using the coupon

Maximum call charge from a BT landline is 10p a minute. Calls from other networks may vary. GardenBargains.com, Ideal Home House, Newark Road, Peterborough, PE1 5WG. Delivery is normally within 21 days. Offer only available while stocks last.

Post to: GardenBargains.com, Ideal Home House, Newark Road, Peterborough, PE1 5WG.

Item	Offer Description	Price	Qty	Total
200330	Amaryllis Belladonna (5 Bulbs)	£12.99		
200330	Buy 2 Sets (10 Bulbs) SAVE £8.00!	£17.98		
400302	10 Double Queen Hellebores SAVE £5.00!	£12.99		
300664	GardenBoost Swell Gel & Feed (500g pack)	£9.99		
Add SH&I (Delivery to UK mainland only*)				£4.99
Total order value				

*Surcharges may apply to N.Ireland, I.O.Wright, I.O.Man, Channel Islands, Scottish Highlands & Islands.

I enclose a cheque/PO (name & address on the back) for £ _____ payable to GardenBargains.com or charge my Visa / Mastercard / Maestro

Card Number _____

Start Date: _____ Expiry Date: _____ Maestro Issue No: _____ Security No: _____ (Last 5 numbers on back of card)

Mr/Ms/Miss First Name _____ Surname _____

Address _____ Post Code _____

Telephone No: _____

E-mail _____

GardenBargains.com is a trade name of Lead The Good Life Ltd. Company number 0640282. Some items may be supplied by Lead The Good Life (Borey) Ltd. Registered office: Borey House, 3 Old Street, St. Helier, JE2 3HG. Company number 09592. © Copyright Lead The Good Life Limited, 2011.

YET ANOTHER AMAZING OFFER FROM GardenBargains.com