Butternut Pumpkin

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Site Selection: Site should be clean and free from sticks and soil should be well-drained.

Ground Preparation: Soil is to be disced with an offset disc to loosen the top 20 cm to allow hilling up. Apply all fertiliser and limes to planting mound only. Adjust pH to 6.0-6.5 by applying dolomite to planting mound as required. Apply superphosphate at 60 g/m^2 plus high analysis 5N:10P:10K at 60 g/m^2.

Incorporate fertilizer and dolomite, form planting hill then apply insecticide to planting mound to control seed eating ants. This is usually done in the same operation as laying the plastic mulch. Organic mulch is recommended for the home garden.

Lay 60-90 cm wide plastic mulch and drip tape and cut 8 cm diameter planting holes every 60–80 cm. Planting mound is 40 cm wide and 10 cm high. Plant seeds 3 cm deep directly into the soil in each hole in the plastic mulch.

Plant Spacing: 60-80 cm between plants along the row. 1.5–2.0 m between rows to suit machinery. 5–6 m or 9–12 m roadways for every three or six rows to suit spraying or harvesting machinery.

Varieties: Butternut seeds are available at all seed distributors.

Irrigation: Water two times/day with high flow drip tape or drippers, for approximately 15 min /day or 20 L/plant/week. Increase the irrigation as the plant grows or evaporation increases to 30-40 min/day or 40 L/plant/week. Monitor the soil moisture using tensiometers to keep water in the root zone. Reduce amount of water at harvest to reduce splitting of fruit.

Nutrition: Pre-plant fertiliser as above in ground preparation. Pre-flowering fertigation- inject weekly via irrigation at 12N: 3P: 9K (kg/ha/week).

Post-flowering fertigation - inject weekly via irrigation at 6N:9K:5Ca (kg/ha/week). Reduce fertigation by half when the fruit is half full. Stop fertiliser at first pick. Inject trace elements in 4 pre-flowering fertigations to total 15 ZnSO4: 8 MnSO4: 2 Solubor (kg/ha/crop). Monitor the nutrition of commercial crops with petiole sap testing. When used as a rotation in old banana country, use max 40n kg/ha/crop in fertigation.

Pests: Ginger ants, pumpkin beetle, caterpillars, aphids and 28 spot lady-bird.

Diseases: Powdery mildew, downy mildew, gummy stem blight and watermelon mosaic virus.

Common Problems: Splitting of pumpkins, which can be caused by irregular or excess watering during late fruit development. Reduce watering steadily after first pick. Poor fruit set can be due to lack of pollination, use two beehives/ha. Ginger ants eating seeds at planting. Pumpkin beetle can be an occasional problem. If plastic or organic mulch is not used, weeds will be a problem.

Harvesting: Harvest pumpkins when fruit stalk starts to dry out and skin colour loses any green tint. Mature pumpkins have a dark gold flesh colour when cut. Potential yields 20-30 tonne/ha. Crop cycle (planting to harvest) 13-22 weeks depending on variety and temperatures.

References: http://www.dpi.qld.gov.au/horticulture/4852.html
http://www.dpi.qld.gov.au/thematiclists/1186.html

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