

The Remarkable Squash

by Alma Swain, Saskatoon

Curcubita pepo, more commonly called Squash, is a vegetable, a master planner, designer, and producer; it is a big-leafed sprawling plant that monopolizes the garden without seeming rhyme or reason. From the time the first two leaves crack the soil and push through to the sunlight, it looks as if it could master all it surveys; and it can, except for below-freezing temperatures which can really lay it low.

Those first leaves are not an indication of what its leaves are going to be like, but after that first bit of deception they begin to show their true form and are like cucumber leaves. Don't be fooled again, though, as when new leaves are added they are ever-increasing in size until you begin to think of the story of "Jack and the Bean Stalk."

So far so good; you have just learned to live with this overgrown child of the Pepo family when it begins to show signs of real growing pains. For now it has reached the adolescent stage and is beginning to send out gawky-looking limbs in all directions, and each of these limbs will grow at least four inches every day. An unproductive bloom appears, a big happy yellow flower, slightly unsure of itself, and it soon folds up and drops off, to be followed by many more. The plant is not ready to reproduce yet, but *Curcubita* in its wisdom knows that being bisexual it must be absolutely certain that when the female flower comes along there will be an ample number of male flowers around to assure it of good fertilization.

The spreading stalks thicken and send out strong tendrils. It is the tendrils that raise this plant far above the simple cabbage or turnip. At first they look like long straight fingers feeling around for something to grasp, and like baby fingers they close on anything that comes within their reach. If this happens to be the trellis, well and good. The fingers spread out and each one gets a hold. Then the most amazing thing happens—the thing that proves that science is not all in the mind of man. We know that a straight piece of wire hasn't the give and resiliency of

a coil. These tendrils, not being content with anything less than the best, begin to take on a curly appearance; and before you know what is going on, there is the finest coiled spring you ever saw. Now let the winds blow and tug, let the fruit grow to any size; these ingenious springs will thicken and grow in strength and resiliency. There is one of these attachments for every leaf close to the spot where the bloom and heavy fruit will be.

The stage is now set for the female flower to appear, and one fine morning out she comes riding on a miniature squash. The male flowers are here, there, and everywhere, and so mating begins. When fertilization has taken place, the bloom drops off and the fruit begins to grow. Many of these female blossoms are discarded by nature; since the vine could not support or feed a squash at every section, a fine piece of selection takes place; Darwin calls it "the survival of the fittest," and so it is. Now just sit back and watch the chosen ones grow, and when the fruit turns a lovely golden color, cut one off and prepare it for the table. If you want a dish that is a gourmet's delight do it this way:

Pare, scoop out seeds and pulpy matter, and cut into two-inch pieces. Drop these into boiling water to which salt has been added. Boil until soft; drain, and place in a casserole. Pour some melted butter and brown sugar over the pieces, add one-quarter cup water, and put in the oven to bake for half an hour. Remove the lid a few minutes before serving so the squash will be dry and mealy. Serve.

CURATOR OF ZOOLOGY WANTED FOR MUSEUM

At the Summer Meeting in June, 1962, a resolution was passed urging the DNR to appoint a curator of zoology to the SMNH staff. Such a position has now been advertised: Museum Curator II, SMNH, Regina, to maintain and augment Museum collections in ornithology and mammology; with graduate degree, preferably in zoology, and experience in museum or related work (Salary \$484-\$589; Ph.D. \$589-\$715). We hope this position will soon be filled.