

Cucurbit Transplants;

One common myth I see around is that cucurbits do not transplant well. Cucurbits transplant really well but its very easy to do it wrong. Most people start with transplanting tomatoes, or peppers. They then attempt to grow and transplant cucurbits the same way. Cucurbits are a whole different animal that need to be grown differently.

There are three stages to growing a cucurbit plant ready to transplant.

The first stage is germination – Always plant the seed in the soil and use a heating mat. You do not want to start them in water, a paper towel or in a group. Any damage to the delicate root system is an avenue for disease and the wound response can slow down their growth. Cucurbits germinate best in the 80-90F range. Make sure that the soil is wet but not saturated (especially watermelons). Once the cotyledon is fully emerged, they need an application of fertilizer before the first true leaf develops.

The second stage is cotyledon to first true leaf. If growing indoors the plants need very bright lighting. Stretched out cotyledons snap off, are more susceptible to damping off, and helicopter in the wind after transplant. I personally leave the lights on 24hrs per day at this stage.

Once the first true leaf is out and the second true leaf is starting to develop its time for the third stage: hardening them off. Place them outside in a partially shady spot and allow them to grow. This stage lasts until the 4rd true leaf starts to emerge.

Then it's time to transplant. Once the plant is past the 5th true leaf the transplant shock will likely set it back 3-4 weeks in development. Do NOT allow the plant to get too large. Its better to not transplant at all and direct seed.

When transplanting, do not remove any leaves or bury the cotyledons. All leaves need to remain above the soil surface. An application of a ½ rate liquid fertilizer when watering the plants in is highly recommended. The soil temp must be above 60F to transplant cucurbits. Any colder and they shut down and don't grow. They seriously don't like their roots to be cold.

If you notice I reference growth stages not exact days. The total time from seeding to transplant can be as little as 10 days for some squash plants. Others like watermelons can take up to 30 days to be ready to go. Cantaloupes, honeydews and cucumbers take 16-24 days.