

Bed #8 Buckwheat and Mooregold squash

This planting is an experiment in weed suppression in combination with growing squash. Buckwheat is a fast-growing cover crop that out paces the growth of the weeds. The Mooregold Squash has been a favorite of mine for many years. It was developed for the Wisconsin gardener by Professor Moore, a plant breeder at the University of Wisconsin in the years 1958-62. This squash looks very much like a small pumpkin when mature. The flesh is orange with a wonderful flavor. The heavy "hide" on this squash is somewhat difficult to split but makes for a very long keeper.

The squash plants were seeded into 4" pots and allowed to grow until the true leaves were well established. The three seedlings selected for the planting were set into a single large hill at which time two pounds of buckwheat was sown with a hand broadcast spreader onto the bed surface. The buckwheat was worked into the soil with a garden rake. Germination for the majority of seeding was about five to six days. The sequence of growth development in the planting is shown in the photos (See attached).

When the buckwheat reached flowering stage, it was cut down with a weed whip to lay on the bed as a mulch. The squash had already started to vine. The stubble was left as a means of anchoring the squash vines as they matured.

I think that this technique does have merit. I have in the past used pine needles and chopped leaves as a heavy mulch to suppress weeds in squash patches only have the vines rolled and, in some cases, tore out in high wind storms. The buckwheat stubble does provide for good tendril anchoring.

Timing is important in a planting such as this. I always prefer to germinate squash seeds in a controlled situation rather than direct seeding and relying on the weather to promote germination. My technique is to lightly remove the seed coat in a segment on either side of the seed, up away from the "point" with a piece of sand paper or fingernail file prior to soaking in water for a few hours. I then place them into a wet paper towel and into a plastic bag for germination at 70-80 degrees F, which typically takes 4 -7 days. When the radical appears, they are then placed into in a 4" pot with soilless mix, radical oriented down. The squash should be started three to four weeks prior to setting out into the hill the first to second week of June.

My timing was off this year, the result of holding on to the squash seedlings too long while waiting for a germination test to be completed on some older buckwheat seed that turned out to be compromised, and then I had to purchase new seed. I would have preferred to have allowed the buckwheat to mature further into flowering before cutting it down as it would have provided better mulch, plus the flowers attract pollinators. The squash had started to vine and was fast being "buried" by the buckwheat, as seen in the photographs.