

## **The pumpkin maxima family**

Apart from the pepo species with its zucchini, pumpkins, patisson, patidou and the amusing spaghetti squash, there are still two other species that contain treasures: the species maxima and the species moschata. They are even considered to be the the best squashes.

### **The species maxima**

This is the best of all. It is the floret of squash maxima and there are many varieties. The maxima are easy to cultivate in the moderate climate of the Centre and North of France. You can easily distinguish them from their cousins, the moschata species thanks to their leaves that are little lobed, almost round and especially thanks to their peduncle, big, round and thick and covered with fibrillations that give them a spongy appearance. These squashes exist in all sizes in all shapes and with varied colours.



### **Some of the most famous varieties:**



#### ***The bright red pumpkin of Etampes***

It is undoubtedly the best known due to the anteriority of its cultivation in the garden. In the last century and until the 60s or 70s, it was very often cultivated. It is true, that it is a magnificent squash, with its brilliant brick red colour and of good size. However, we nowadays know that its taste doesn't match its appearance. Very largely supplanted by other varieties that appeared about

thirty years ago, its soft flesh is not very tasty and is generally used in soup with milk or cream.

#### ***The blue pumpkin from Hungary***

As its name suggests this pumpkin comes from the East. It is one of the favourites of squash lovers. Round in shape, a little ribbed, it is light in colour with a nice blue-green and its flesh is thick, firm and orange. Its size is not excessive which is of a great advantage when you do not have a large family. It



weighs about 3 kilos on average. It is not too demanding to cultivate, provided it is fed correctly at the beginning and with a scanty but regular watering. It is not often present on market stalls, where you find more well-known varieties. However, its seeds are not hard to find.

### ***The black squash of Eysines***



This one does not go unnoticed! Not by its size, but by its brownish skin covered with corky warts. These warts are very variable in number: sometimes scattered, sometimes covering the whole squash. When you see it, you can wonder if it is really edible. Go straight for it: it is delicious with a special taste, close to the nut, which makes excellent gratins and soups. If you have some left, keep it as a decoration: it will intrigue many

of your visitors.

### ***The pumpkin***

We do not need to present it anymore. It is part of these squashes that appeared twenty years ago and it quickly imposed itself by its taste between nut and like hazelnut, its reasonable size, its flesh being well suited to many preparations like for example: puree, gratin, soufflé, soup etc. Some people also eat it raw and grated. It only has one downside you have to be well equipped to cut its very hard bark. Of



Japanese origin, there are many sub-varieties: Uchuki Kuri, Red Kuri (the best) French pumpkin, bigger and pear shaped, Blue Kuri etc. It is an important source of vitamins and trace elements, which can be enjoyed in the heart of winter.



### ***Marina di Chioggia***

Of dark green colour and blistered with large warts, this is a squash that doesn't look great. It requires space, at least 2 sqm, and can reach a respectable size: 5 to 6 kg. However, when it is found in a kitchen garden, it certainly indicates the presence of a gardener, expert in squashes. For it is without any doubt the best of the maxima

species. Not particularly demanding neither on the field conditions nor on the climate conditions, it requires the manure of a mature compost to help it reach maturity in October. You can try to curb its expansion by cutting it, but then you will have larger squashes. It has a dark orange flesh, thick and sweet, and can be kept without any problem in a temperate room until February – March. If you have a very large specimen, you can cut the flesh into cubes and freeze it for later use.

*Alain Redon*