

[Photos, graphics and other information can be found at:

<http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/news/columns/dakota-gardener/dakota-gardener-bear-vs-zucchini-who-would-win>]

Dakota Gardener: Bear vs. Zucchini - Who Would Win?

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We all joke about growing zucchini. The vegetable gets no respect.

A zucchini vine is an amazing producer of nutritious vegetables. And yet, instead of admiring this humble vegetable, we ridicule it and take it for granted.

We dump extra zucchini in unlocked cars in the neighborhood. We drop off bags of it on the doorsteps of unsuspecting neighbors.

When the Hunger Free North Dakota project started, while begging for vegetable donations, organizers said only one zucchini plant was needed per county. Zucchini gets no respect. It's so plentiful and nobody knows what to do with it.

When I was a kid, my brothers and I always found uses for zucchini. We enjoyed using giant zucchinis as baseball bats.

Did you know zucchinis float? You can carve a big zucchini into the shape of a canoe, put a mast on it and have zucchini toy boat races.

It's truly a versatile vegetable.

I recently discovered another use of zucchini - as a weapon! Do you know the Legend of Montana Maggie?

Montana Maggie loved the outdoors and she loved her garden. One day, a bear wandered in her backyard and started to eat apples from her tree. This angered Maggie's dogs and they started to bark. Bark! Bark! Bark!

This barking made the bear mad.

The bear started to attack one of Maggie's dogs. This made Maggie mad. She kicked the bear under the chin using a kick she learned from her self-defense training at the YMCA.

That got the bear really mad.

The bear swiped at Maggie's leg and started to move toward her.

Maggie scrambled back into the house. She tried to close the door, but the bear stuck its head through the doorway.

Maggie's life was in jeopardy. She got behind the door and tried to close it with all of her might, but the bear was too strong. Maggie could feel the breath of the angry bear on her face. Out of desperation, she blindly reached with her hand for something - anything - on the kitchen counter to defend herself. She found it.

No, it wasn't a knife. It was a zucchini she harvested that morning. She grabbed the zuke and bopped it on the bear's head.

The startled bear turned away and ran in fear.

Now zucchini has my utmost respect. It can nourish, entertain and protect you.

We all can learn from Montana Maggie and grow zucchini in our gardens this year. The soil is warm, and the seeds will sprout rapidly. In less than two months, you can enjoy the goodness of zucchini fruits and blossoms in all kinds of meals and snacks. Lots of websites are dedicated to zucchini cuisine.

The most irritating thing about growing zucchini is harvesting the fruits within the spiny vines. Sow a variety with short or no spines and an open plant habit. Strong performers in North Dakota include Spineless Beauty, Cashflow, Raven and Desert. These and other F1 hybrids resist diseases and continue producing fruits until frost.

To make harvesting less prickly, give plants ample space. Make sure they are at least 18 inches apart in rows spaced 6 feet apart. Harvest regularly, two or three times a week. Gently twist or cut the fruits off the vine when they are tender, about 6 to 8 inches long.

What are you waiting for? You never know when the next bear will strike!

For more information, contact your local NDSU Extension agent. Find the Extension office for your county at <https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/extension/directory/counties>.

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