

SQUASH SOCKS

A few years ago, I discovered a great way to help discourage vine borers on my squash plants and cucumbers. Then, CHIPMUNKS happened. A couple years in a row they have decimated my bean seedlings as well as many other plants I would put into the ground. Looking for a way to discourage or prevent their attacks, I decided to try my trusted solution for vine borers to see if it would work against other creatures. This year on just about anything going into the vegetable garden I was going to use - squash socks. I mentioned them in our video and blog on how to use TP tubes for seed starting! I have also discussed them before in other videos, blogs and social media posts.

Up here at our elevation, we are just getting deep into full blown garden season – both flower garden AND veggie garden have ended the spring plantings, and I will be starting second crops of several items this coming week. We still have a few veggies and fruits needing to be direct seed, as well.

It is tough sometimes because we are usually quite a bit behind the rest of you – every spring I see YOUR gardens already producing lots of yummy veggies while we are just getting things into the ground. We live above 2500 feet in the Appalachians and things work differently up here - we have to wait a week or so after everyone else is already done putting in their plants and seeds before we even start. Most people use Mother's Day as their marker, but up here we often frost the week after Mother's day. Some years we can start planting around the 20th of May, finishing up getting everything into the ground by June 1st or so. Other years we may still be planting the 3rd week of June. This also affects when we will get invaders we want to do away with.

Just like every other year, I had to fight my impatience this year to put things in the ground right away. But FINALLY! It was time a couple weeks ago and I started putting in squash plants, cucumbers, loofah, and direct seeding green beans. Then I planted tomato and pepper seedlings right after that.

If you have seen my posts on social media, you have heard me rant about our plants being nipped off just after sprouting – mostly by those ridiculous chipmunks. So, because of the chipmunks, and even some slugs, we needed protection on just about everything this year. I prefer to deter as much as possible without using chemicals or DE. Diatomaceous earth can be a great help, but it can affect and kill some GOOD bugs as well as bad. I am very careful with using it. These squash socks are a great solution to protecting many plants without using any treatments at all, plus they also help with chipmunks and larger slugs.

Throughout the year, in a grocery bag hanging in the pantry, I place all the mesh veggie bags we can save. Veggie bags just like these. Come springtime, depending on length of that mesh bag, I cut it into sections using scissors – each produce bag yields 3 or 4 sections.

Here's what I do: for the squash plants, I usually cut a nice section of bag long enough to protect the section of vine at the base, nearest the ground. Beyond this first section, as the vine creeps along the soil, you can cover sections of the vine with soil to help protect other sections from the vine borers – the vine may also set additional roots along the way, drawing up more water and nutrients to feed the squash growing along it.

With our Cushaw and zucchini plants, I took the seedlings from their TP tube pots, placed that soil plug into the mesh sleeve I created, slid that sleeve into the hole I had dug, then covered the roots with soil – leaving the “squash sock” about an inch below the surface.

For the first planting of green beans, however, I dug the hole directly in the garden, set the bottom edge of the bag a bit below the surface, placed seeds in that hole, then covered seeds with soil. As the beans grow, they will grow up through the bag and it will help to protect them. Why not just wait until they sprout to put the socks on the seedlings sprouting from the ground? Because last year, the chipmunks and possibly some squirrels dug up all our bean seeds as I planted them. THIS will make them more difficult to dig up. As plants grow inside the sock, chipmunks won't be able to lop them off and eat them, either. This will also deter rabbits that sometimes sneak in.

The good news is that it is working tremendously – the green beans are already almost a foot tall! They are doing so much better this year, and it appears they ALL came up. As usual, the squash plants are doing well, too – the Cushaw seem to be doing the best and are well protected!

One big warning I need to pass along – after growing season, pull up your squash socks. Especially if you are going to machine till in the fall or next spring, PLEASE!!! They cannot be reused because they are too brittle the next year anyway. If left lying around they also can become a hazard for wildlife wandering into the garden for leftovers like seeds or greenery left behind after harvest. I just toss them into a grocery bag and into the trash. Also don't leave them in the ground thinking they will break down – they really won't. Although they are made of a plastic that ought to deteriorate after a certain time, I have never seen this happen. Plus, when you go to till your veggie beds, those socks will tie themselves around your tiller tines and make a HUGE mess. Yes, I speak from experience! In fact, my little tiller recently dug up a white mesh bag from the very first year I used them to protect squash plants! It tied itself around the tiller and made a dreadful mess – and was also evidence of how long it might take for them to break down!

I have been using these bags for 4 growing seasons now and love them for protecting plants and now seeds, too. I do have to say, in all the time using them, I have not had a single plant die or be infected by vine borers at the base of the plant. Not one! I HAVE had a couple of butternut plants get attacked down the line where I didn't remember to cover the vines with soil.

Now you have a simple, easy, free, recycling idea to help protect your garden AND increase your production for your family.

I hope this idea helps.

Blessings and shalom!