

# Bolton Land Trust Musing – November, 2016

## Identity Issues at our Farm Stands

A tomato and a pumpkin were arguing. “I am not a fruit. I am a vegetable” said the tomato. “No you’re not a vegetable, you’re a fruit”, replied the pumpkin, correctly, “but I am a vegetable”. “Wrong” said the tomato, “you are a fruit too”, and he was right. He added, “Go back and tell your fellow squashes the bad news”. “I am not a squash!” replied the pumpkin, but he was wrong about that. At this time of year farm stands such as Deercrest Farm in Glastonbury, where my husband and I are members of the Community Supported Agriculture program, are filled with a bounty of all shapes, sizes and colors, and it is fun to sort out what food groups the produce belongs to.



The difference between a fruit and a vegetable is that a fruit is the mature ovary of a flowering plant that encloses seeds, and a vegetable is any edible part of a plant such as roots, stems, leaves, flowers and seeds. Tomatoes begin as flowers and become the seed-bearing part of the plant, so they are fruit. Pumpkins begin the same way, as flowers on a vine, and develop out of the reproductive structure of the flower and become a seed-bearing structure, so they are fruit too. Other fruits that are usually considered vegetables are peppers, cucumbers, avocados, okra, olives and eggplant.

Not only are pumpkins fruit, they are squash and they are gourds. All three are under the big botanical umbrella *Cucurbitacea*, of which gourds are a subset and pumpkins, squash and gourds All three are under the big botanical umbrella *Cucurbitacea* of which gourds are a subset and pumpkins, squash and gourds are a category below that. Butternut squash is in the *Curcubita moschata* sub-category, blue hubbards and buttercup are members of the *Curcubita maxima* group, and carving pumpkins, sugar pumpkins (which are much better for eating than the carving type),

acorn, delicata, spaghetti and dumpling squash and small decorative gourds are members of the *Curcubita pepo* sub-group.



All of these fruit/squash/gourds are called “winter squash” not because they are grown or harvested in the winter but because their durable rinds keep them fresh for weeks or months. Zucchini and yellow squash are called “summer squash” because they have soft outer coverings and cannot be stored for long.

While it’s an interesting exercise to dig down into the botanical roots of the plants we eat, the distinctions aren’t critical unless you are a rookie shopper and need to identify what’s edible and what’s decorative. One writer summarized it nicely by saying all we really need to know is that “Pumpkins are for carving, squash are for cooking and eating and gourds are for looking at”.\*



The tomato taunted the pumpkin: “I bet you don’t know how to spell the plural form of my name.” “Tomatoes” replied the pumpkin, and he was correct. The pumpkin quizzed back, “What’s the plural form of squash”? and the tomato had to look it up. It depends on whether the amount can be counted or not: “There were two squashes on the table”, or “A friend cooked squash as a side dish”.

Fruit? Vegetable? Squash? Pumpkin? Gourd? There are so many identity issues this time of year.

Gwen

\* By TED GRIESS, Yard and Garden, on line article dated October 6, 2013