
Courgettes (zucchini)



Market requirements

Varieties: Ambassador, Diamond and Black Jack popular

Standards: The EEC stipulates minimum standard requirements for courgettes, which must be:

- intact, including a stalk which may be slightly damaged
- of fresh appearance
- firm
- sound: (produce affected by rotting or deterioration such as to make it unfit for human consumption is excluded)
- free from damage caused by insects or other parasites
- free of cavities
- free of splits
- clean, and practically free of any visible foreign matter
- sufficiently developed without over-development of seeds (except Class III)
- free of abnormal moisture content
- free of any foreign smell and/or taste

Three classes are defined:

Class I may show slight:

- defects of shape
- defects of colouring
- healed cracks of the skin

The courgettes must include a stalk of a maximum length of 3 cm.

Class II may show:

- defects of shape
- defects of colouring
- slight sun-scorch

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- healed cracks of the skin, provided these do not impair conservation

Class III (which can be introduced or withdrawn by the EEC as market conditions demand) should satisfy the requirements for Class II, but may also show:

- a development of seeds
- slight traces of soil

Tolerances are allowed of 10% of weight for Class I, providing they meet the requirements of Class II, 10% for Class II not meeting minimum standards, providing they are fit for human consumption, and 15% for Class III, under the same conditions.

Size: Sizing can be by length or weight, with length being measured from the junction of the stalk and the end of the fruit.

Length should fall within the following scale:

- 7-14 cm inclusive
- 14 cm (exclusive) to 21 cm (inclusive)
- 21 cm (exclusive) to 30 cm

14-18 cm is the most popular, with 75 mm diameter

Weight should be according to the following scale:

- 50-100 grams (inclusive)
- 100 grams (exclusive) to 225 grams (inclusive)
- 225 grams (exclusive) to 450 grams

Class III need not conform to the size scale. Tolerances of 10% above or below those specified are allowed

Shape: Reasonably straight, not mis-shapen, some ridging towards stem preferred

Colour: Medium green preferred, can bespeckled
Not black green or heavily striped green

Ripeness: Fresh, crisp and firm

**Taste &
Texture:** Crunchy, juicy; sweet when cooked.

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Getting to market

Harvesting, Handling and Storage

Courgettes must be picked young, when crisp and hard, and cut from the plant, leaving a small stem. They have to be handled carefully from harvesting onwards in order not to damage their skin. They should be cooled quickly after harvesting and kept at a temperature between 8 and 12°C and a relative humidity of 90-95% for an optimum storage life of between 8 and 14 days.

Packaging

Courgettes must be flat packed in well ventilated cartons of 2, 3, 5 or 6 kg, with smaller packages used in the winter months when air-freighted. They must be well graded and lined up in layers

in the cartons, which can be lined and layered with tissue paper to protect the skins from damage in transit. They can be consumer packed at source, in overlaid trays.

Labelling must include:

- country of origin
- produce indication (if contents not visible)
- class
- net weight

It is advisable to include (and mandatory for EEC and Mediterranean countries) the following information:

- size
- date of packing
- packer
- grower

It is also advisable to include handling information on the carton:

- side-up symbol
- fragile symbol
- temperature guidance

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Branding and Promotion

There is no generic advertising of courgettes, but certain exporters use brand names in order to promote their produce.

Import Regulations

Courgettes come under tariff heading 0709 90 70 and tariffs for courgettes entering the EEC are as follows:

Full tariff:	16%
GSP countries:	9% (1 Jan-28 Feb) Full tariff for other periods
ACP countries:	Free
Cyprus:	4.6% (1 Jan-28 Feb and 1-31 Dec) 11.6% (1 -15 Mar) Full tariff for other periods
Malta, Tunisia, Algeria:	6.4% (1 Jan-28 Feb and 1-31 Dec) Full tariff for other periods
Israel:	5.6% (1 Jan-28 Feb and 1-31 Dec) Full tariff for other periods
Jordan, Morocco:	6.4% (1 Jan-28 Feb and 1-31 Dec) 7.1% (1-15 Mar) Full tariff for other periods
Egypt:	7.1% (1 Jan-15 Mar and 1-31 Dec) Full tariff for other periods

In order to receive preferential tariff treatment, produce must be accompanied by the appropriate forms: EUR 1 for ACP countries or Form A for GSP countries or least developed developing countries (LDDC). Courgettes are also governed by the reference price system from 21 April to 30 September, through which a compensatory tax is levied on produce if CIF prices are below the price set seasonally (or for part of a season) by the EEC. Certain hygiene standards must be met and all fresh produce entering the EEC must be accompanied by the original of a phytosanitary certificate (see Appendix 1).

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When to sell

Timing

The UK produces courgettes through the summer months of June to September, and the French production season extends from March to October, France being the second largest exporter to the UK. Spain is by far the largest supplier, accounting for over 50% of imports, supplying over the winter period of November to May. Italy is the next largest supplier (November-June), followed by Jordan (December-May) and the USA, which can supply year-round. Other winter suppliers are Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jamaica, Kenya, Mexico and Zimbabwe. There are few supplying gaps, though buyers are keen to diversify their sources in order to hedge against poor quality supplies in case of poor weather in Spain.

Wholesale prices of courgettes are quoted regularly on the market and have averaged around 95 pence per kg during 1989/90, reaching a low of 30 pence in August and up to 180 pence in January/February. Prices have also shown a generally rising trend over the year and have not fallen back in the spring as usually happens.

Market Trends

Imports of courgettes have grown by over 300% over the last decade and have now reached almost 17,000 tons per annum. Volumes are expected to continue to grow, although at a slower pace. Without significant gaps in the market, new suppliers may find it difficult to enter the market. However, buyers are diversifying supplies in the winter and prices have been on an upward trend. There is also likely to be a growing demand for mini courgettes.