

Can Mirlitons Interbreed With Other Squash?

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Many people have asked if there is a danger of interbreeding (cross-pollination) if they grow mirlitons with other squash like Cucuzza and luffa. That's understandable because the vines look and flower similarly. The short answer is no, mirlitons and other squash species can't cross-pollinate.

Mirlitons can only pollinate other mirlitons, and other squash can't pollinate mirlitons.

But here's an easy way to determine the danger of interbreeding with *any* combination of plants.

We usually use common names for plants, but the key to knowing if they can interbreed is knowing the scientific name, called "*binomial name*" which consists of the two words; *genus* and *species*. It is analogous to your personal name; your last name is your *genus* (family name) and your first name is specifically who you are in the family (*specie*).

To determine the possibility of interbreeding, simply google the common name followed by the words "binomial name." For example, if you google mirliton and "binomial name," your first return is *Sechium edule*, which is the binomial name you are looking for. Then google Cucuzza and "binomial name" and it will return *Lagenaria siceraria*. Now you know the genus and species of both.

Mirliton:

Genus: *Sechium*

Species: *S. edule*

Cucuzza:

Genus: *Lagenaria*

Species *L. siceraria*

The two vines are in a *different genus* (*genera* is the plural), and *different genera seldom interbreed*.

What if you have two plants in the same *genus*? Then look at the second name—the species. If they are the same species, they *can* generally cross-pollinate—that's how botanists define species—any plants that are capable of interbreeding. There are exceptions, but to be safe, don't plant them together until you contact a plant expert who can advise you.

Now, practice the method on another plant:

Find the scientific names (binomial names) for *mirliton* and *cucumber*. Compare them. Are they the same genus? If not, then it's safe to plant them together.

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