

PUMPKIN

Pumpkin is a warm-season crop used primarily for Halloween decoration; it also is used for pies, breads, cookies, soup, and roasted seeds. Immature flowers can be stir-fried and small pumpkins used as summer squash.



Varieties

Pumpkins produce large sprawling vines that take up a lot of space in the garden. Some pumpkin varieties are bush or semivining types that take less space but still spread.

Small--Small Sugar Pie and Spookie are 8-10 lb size, while Baby Pam is smaller. Jack Be Little or Munchkin are miniature pumpkins.

Medium--Spirit (compact vine), Cinderella (compact vine), and Youngs Beauty.

Large--Connecticut Field, Howden, Jackpot (semi-vining), and Ghost Rider are jack-o-lantern types. Autumn Gold colors quickly and completely.

Huge--Big Max, Atlantic Giant, and Big Moon are specimen types.

When to plant

Pumpkins can be safely planted after all danger of frost is past in early to mid-May. June-planted pumpkins are ready for harvest in early October.

Spacing

Pumpkin vines need 50-60 square feet per hill-- 1-2 plants--and standard vining types should be planted about 4-5 feet apart in 12-foot rows. Small or semi-vining types can be planted 3-4 feet apart in 6-foot rows. Plant seed about one inch deep.

Care

Provide shallow cultivation to keep weeds from developing in areas where vines will spread, because weeds will be difficult to remove later. Water thoroughly as the fruit start to develop. Only female flowers develop into fruit; male flowers outnumber female flowers and appear first. Bees transfer pollen from male to female flowers, so use insecticides with care.

Harvesting

Pumpkins are ready for harvest when the skin is tough and hard and the stem no longer "leaks" when cut from the vine. Cut the stem with a sharp knife or pruning shears to leave a "handle" attached to each fruit. Store pumpkins in a warm dry location for 2-3 weeks to further dry and cure the fruit. Storage temperatures of 50-60° F in a dry location out of direct sunlight will maintain pumpkins' bright color.

Common concerns

Powdery mildew
Squash bugs

Crossing Squash and Pumpkins

Pumpkins, squash, and gourds are closely related members of the Cucurbit or vine crop family. Four species of the genus *Cucurbita* are used as vegetables, and crossing can occur within species only. Cross pollination, however, will only influence the crop if you save your own seed for next year's crop. The term "pumpkin" is used for anything that is round and orange, while the term "squash" is used for an edible fruit of some other shape or color. The term "gourd" is used for various shaped and sized fruit used for decoration. The four species, with some common varieties for each, are:

* *Cucurbita pepo*, true pumpkins. Most jack-o-lantern pumpkins, zucchini, yellow summer squash, scallop or patty pan Squash, acorn squash, most small, yellow-flowered gourds.

* *Cucurbita maxima*, true squash. Large pumpkins (Big Max, Atlantic Giant), hubbard squash, buttercup squash, delicious squash, Turk's Turban squash.

* *Cucurbita moschata*, Dickinson field (pie pumpkins), Kentucky field, butternut squash.

* *Cucurbita mixta*. Green striped cushaw, sweetpotato squash, Japanese pie pumpkins.

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