

Pumpkin

Cucurbita pepo, *Cucurbita maxima*

Thought to have originated in Central America, pumpkins have been grown for centuries. Most varieties require 100 days or more to ripen, though in recent years breeders have introduced some fast-maturing varieties for northern gardeners. For best results, amend your pumpkin patch with plenty of organic matter.

TIP – To grow a giant pumpkin, look for the species *Cucurbita maxima*, which is not the typical pumpkin species ('Big Max' is a *C. maxima*). Prune off all but one of the developing fruits, and fertilize the plant weekly.

Location and soil Plant pumpkins in full sun, and give them plenty of space to run. Assume that a jack-o-lantern type pumpkin has a vining habit unless the seed packet description identifies it as a "bush" pumpkin.

When to Plant Sow seeds directly into the garden after danger of frost; soil should be 65°F or warmer. Seeds can also be planted indoors in biodegradable pots (made from peat or other fibers) 3 weeks before the outdoor planting date.

Seed depth and Spacing Sow 4-5 seeds 1 inch deep in hills spaced 5-6 feet apart. Space vining pumpkin rows at least 10 feet apart.

Germination Seed germinates in 5-7 days in soil that is 70° to 80° F, but can take longer in colder soil.

Thinning Thin seedlings when they have 2-3 true leaves, leaving the strongest 2-3 plants per hill.




Care Pumpkins need a steady supply of water as they grow. Water deeply at planting time and whenever the "finger test" shows that the soil is dry 3-4 inches below the surface. Mulch the pumpkin patch heavily with straw or leaf mulch, or grow on black plastic.

Pests Cucumber beetles can kill pumpkin seedlings, but even worse, they can spread bacterial wilt, which destroys the vines later in the season. Protect young vines with row covers, removing them when flowers appear. Squash bug invasions can also cause a lot of damage. Inspect undersides of leaves often for rows of coppery eggs, and crush them. Plant rotation will help prevent pest problems.

Fertilize Add a generous amount of compost to the soil prior to planting, and side-dress with compost or a balanced fertilizer when the first flowers appear.

Harvest A pumpkin is ready to harvest when the rind is a deep, solid color, and hard enough that it cannot be poked by a fingernail.

Nutrition Melon is an excellent source of vitamins A and C, and potassium, and a good source of niacin, vitamin B6 and folate.

	Big Max	Connecticut Field 	Jack O Lantern 	Montana Jack 
Description	<i>Cucurbita Maxima</i> : Famous for its very large orange fruits.	<i>C. pepo</i> : Heirloom orange pumpkin ideal for carving. Flesh is yellow, and somewhat stringy.	<i>C. pepo</i> : Round, orange pumpkin with thick flesh well-suited for jack-o-lanterns.	<i>C. pepo</i> : Fast-ripening round, orange pumpkin with thick flesh.
Fruit size	40-400 lbs	10-20 lbs	10-15 lbs	8-15 lbs
Comments	Needs ample space.	Classic jack-o-lantern pumpkin.	Classic jack-o-lantern pumpkin.	Good for northern climates.
Harvest	120 days	110 days	105 days	90 days