

Guide to Growing Pumpkins

Growing pumpkins is a great activity for the whole family. It's easy to be a successful gardening **growing pumpkins**, all you need is seeds. Pumpkins are a long-season crop, you can grow anywhere from southern Canada (USDA Zone 3) south into the tropics. Almost any pumpkin seed ultimately will produce pumpkins.

Pumpkins come in a wide number of varieties from the traditional Jack O'Lantern variety known as the Connecticut Field Pumpkin which is the one produced by most commercial growers to more exotic varieties; Baby Boo, Munchkin, Spooktacular, Big Max, Cinderella, Lumina, Atlantic Giant ... and many more. Pumpkin varieties come in a wide range of potential sizes (from a few ounces to over 500 pounds) and in several colors (ranging from white to pink to red to traditional orange). The big ones require more garden space, but the leaves and flowers of the different types look remarkably similar. If your goal is to have the biggest pumpkin on the block, plant 'Atlantic Giant'. These babies regularly weigh in at 200 lbs. and up. Growing giant pumpkins can be a fascinating experience. Before you can master the art of growing a giant, however, you must be familiar with the basic principles of **growing pumpkins**. Once you have become familiar with this information, you are ready to try your hand at **growing pumpkins that are GIANTS!**

Fertilizer and Soil Amendments

Pumpkins are considered "heavy feeders" and do well with a little extra nourishment. **Growing pumpkins are also nitrogen lovers.**

Algoflash is a great balance fertilizer for **growing pumpkins** that provides all the nutrients your **growing pumpkins** will need. Add Algoflash and SoilSyrup to your watering mix and water each pumpkin mound every three or four weeks. It is definitely a power booster. Providing proper nutrients throughout the growing season will insure *healthy, vigorous vines, and growing pumpkins*. Follow label directions and continue application throughout the growing season. Also, avoid wetting leaves when watering. Use soaker hoses or try AquaSpikes for each plant.

If you're **growing Giant pumpkins** remember they will require a lot more fertilizer. Giant pumpkin vines require approximately 2 pounds nitrogen (N), 3 pounds phosphorous (P₂O₂) and 6 pounds potash (K₂O) per 1,000 square feet of growing space. The addition of organic matter to the garden is important to establish good soil tilth, which can be easily done by adding SoilSyrup to your feeding regimen and as a soil treatment.

When planting your pumpkin seeds, it will usually specify to plant in rich soil. But is it rich enough? Soil, can always be improved and if you want to get the most out of your **growing pumpkins**, use SoilSyrup to boost organic matter and make your fertilizing more effective. Feed plants with SoilSyrup every two to three weeks or add a little every time you water.

If you haven't applied fertilizer at all, definitely make sure you start a feeding program after pollination and fruit set have occurred to get the most out of your harvest. Again, Algoflash is great to help boost your pumpkin yields. And for a truly bountiful harvest and bigger pumpkins, use MegaGro for **growing pumpkins**.

Where, when, and how to plant

Buy pumpkin plants at the nursery. Otherwise, start seeds indoors about three weeks before the last expected frost. If your growing season is long and warm, sow seeds directly in the garden when the soil temperature has reached 60 degrees F.

Where: Pumpkins love a sunny spot -- the more sun the better. Choose a place that gets at least 6 hours of direct sunlight every day. Choose a site that gets full sun and has soil with a pH of 6.0 to 6.8. Pumpkins need light, very rich soil that drains well. Add plenty of SoilSyrup to your garden to ensure the right combination. Till your pumpkin patch deep and wide: Both roots and vines can spread as far as 15 feet in all directions. To help prep the soil further, you can mix in AquaRocks, water absorbing crystal to help hold moisture. You water your **growing pumpkins** less throughout the growing season.

When: Seeds can be planted directly in the garden when the days consistently reach into the low 70's and the spring rains have tapered off. In colder climates, the seeds can be started indoors using SpeedSprout or Soaking the seeds with MegaGro the night before planting will soften the outer shell and make sprouting easier and faster. Most pumpkins require

110 to 140 frost-free growing days. The amount of time depends mainly on the variety, the climate, and the number of daylight hours during the summer days. Harden off the seedlings, whether store-bought or homegrown, and transfer them to the garden when all danger of frost has passed.

Growing giant pumpkins requires an early start. Seeds should be sown individually and started indoors in with SpeedSprout or MegaGro.

How: Pumpkins seeds typically are planted in the middle of small hills or mounds that are about three feet in diameter. Surround each hill with a moat (about 4 inches wide and 4 inches deep) to help contain water around the roots. Plant 4 to 5 seeds in a circle in the middle of the hill, and space the seeds about 6 to 8 inches apart. Plant them in hills, setting them at least as deep as they were in the pots. In general allow at least 5 feet between plants in each direction. If you are planting more than one hill of pumpkins, the hills should be 10 feet apart. Cover the seeds with about an inch of soil to block out light and hide them from hungry birds. The soil should be loosely packed and kept moist but not wet. During the seed stage, water gently with a sprinkling can to avoid washing away the covering soil. After 7 to 14 days, the seed sprout cracks the soil.

Pumpkin plants are vigorous vines and love to sprawl. A single vine can grow as long as 30 feet, sending out many vine shoots all along the way. This doesn't mean you can't be **growing pumpkins** along with other fruit and vegetables. Pumpkin vines can be pruned, trained, and redirected to live harmoniously with other plants. Pumpkins are often planted at the edges of a corn and bean patch.

Once the seedlings are established (two weeks after they have sprouted), thin to two or three of the strongest and largest young plants per hill. For Giant Pumpkin, Growing space in the garden is important. Each plant should be allowed approximately 2,500 square feet. This area may sound quite large, but it is essential for vine growth. Pumpkins prefer long hours of sunlight, so select your garden site accordingly. Avoid shaded areas and select an area with good surface and internal drainage.

Watering and Irrigation

Between 80 to 90% of every pumpkin is water; and water is an essential medium for bringing nourishment to the entire plant. Pumpkins are shallow rooted, so water slowly with at least one inch of water per week if rainfall is not adequate. More water may be required during hot, windy summer days for vigorous **growing pumpkins**. Water during morning or early afternoon hours so foliage dries by evening. This helps prevent the spread of leaf diseases. It is best to water the plant at the roots rather than sprinkling from above. Trickle irrigation is best, but soaker hoses also work well. Avoid getting the foliage wet, as wet foliage increases the chance of disease, especially mildew. Try using our [AquaSpikes](#) **for an efficient, inexpensive, and easy to use drip irrigation system for your growing pumpkins**. AquaSpikes can create a deep root watering system that will help prevent weed growth and help you fertilize your **growing pumpkin** plants more effectively. Make sure the plants get 1 to 2 inches of water a week, especially when they're blooming and setting fruit.

Pruning

Pumpkins plants are vigorous growers. Pumpkin vines withstand pruning quite well. Properly done, it strengthens the plant and helps it thrive. Every pumpkin plant has a main and a secondary vine that usually grow in opposite directions. Each of these two vines produces shoots (or tertiary vines) which can be selectively pruned as the plant develops. It is best to clip when these new side shoots begin to develop. The plant will leak or bleed a little when it is clipped, but it seals over quickly. The amount of pruning usually depends on how much garden space is available the harsh truth is that not every tiny pumpkin is destined to make it to the end of the season.

Flowering and Fruiting

About a week after the two baby leaves appear, the first "true" leaf, sporting jagged edges, starts to grow from the center of the young sprout, providing a glimpse of the plant to come. After three true leaves are established, the pumpkin plant moves into wild and crazy leaf and root development that lasts about eight weeks. At its peak, the vine can grow as much as 6" a day. Ten weeks after planting, the first flowers suddenly appear between leaves and tendrils.

To help force fruiting, spray your flowers with MegaGro to help boost flower set. If you spray the buds, you won't be able to tell which are male or female, but that's okay. You can spray the female flowers again, once they have started to blossom and you can tell them apart.

Each flower blooms for only one day. Every pumpkin plant has two kinds of flowers -- male and female. The male flowers, which appear first, sit on long thin stems and are more plentiful than females. The females sit closer to the vine. Hand pollination is the preferred method to fruit setting, but you can let things happen naturally by letting bees do their thing. To help ensure better fruit set and get larger pumpkins, use MegaGro. Simply spray the blossom to help force flower set.

Pumpkin population control concentrates the energy of the plant and yields larger but of course, fewer pumpkins. Wait for the pumpkins to reach grapefruit size before pruning. Even without selective pruning, all baby pumpkins do not necessarily grow to maturity and may suddenly yellow and shrivel on the vine. Perhaps they were not fully pollinated or maybe they were poorly located on the vine, competing for nourishment with a more developed neighbor. To grow giant pumpkins, allow only 4 to 6 pumpkins per plant. Once **growing pumpkins** reach volleyball size, trim back to one pumpkin. The more you reduce the competition for nutrients, the greater your success rate will be for achieving a giant size pumpkin.

Caring For the Fruit

The basic rule for taking care of the **growing pumpkins** is to handle the fruit as little as possible. At the same time, there are a few widely practiced conventions. Pinch vines back to limit their growth once fruits appear. **Rotate growing pumpkins once in a while to keep them symmetrical**, but take care to move them only a little at a time to avoid breaking the brittle vines. Place boards under large pumpkins to keep them from rotting. This prevents scarring or bruising as the pumpkin grows and rotting if the soil becomes too soggy. Wear gloves; those vines are prickly; and take care not to crease or snap the vine.

With Giant Pumpkins, their size and fast growth, makes training vines and root pruning very important. When the **growing pumpkin** is basketball size, curve the vine 80 to 90 degrees away from the fruit. About 3 feet out from the fruit, curve the vine back in the general direction it was headed. Clip roots 3 feet out on the vine. This will allow the vine to easily move upward as the pumpkin grows. Pumpkins long in shape tend to push the vine forward, resulting in a kink. If this happens, slide the pumpkin back about 4 to 5 inches - this is usually necessary when the pumpkin is about 300 pounds. Pumpkins round in shape are difficult to rotate without damaging the stem. To protect the Giant pumpkins from direct sunlight, construct a shade out of burlap or other lightweight material. *This will prevent premature hardening of the outer skin and will allow the growing pumpkin to reach its full genetic potential in terms of physical size.*

When to Pick

By late August, the days and nights grow colder and the green pumpkins begin to change colors like the fall leaves. **Growing pumpkins** should be harvested when they have a deep, solid color and the rind is hard. The vines are usually dying back at this time. Harvest orange pumpkins after the vines have shriveled and died, but before the first hard freeze. Cut white varieties when their skins are still streaked with green (if they're allowed to ripen outdoors, their shells turn pale yellow). Leave several inches of stem -- it helps them stay fresh -- and let them cure in the sun for 10 days. Cover during a light frost and avoid leaving pumpkins out during a hard freeze to prevent softening. Then, store the harvest in a dry cool place.