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# How to Grow Pumpkins: The Complete Guide



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# Planting, Growing, and Harvesting Pumpkins

By [Catherine Boeckmann](#)

Last Updated: May 30, 2024



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Let's give 'em pumpkin to talk about! Have you ever dreamed of having a pumpkin patch, but you just don't know where to start? How

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lasts? See our Pumpkin Growing Guide, which covers everything from planting to harvesting.

## About Pumpkins

Did you know pumpkins have been grown in North America for almost 5,000 years? This native plant is a lot of fun to grow.

There are two requirements for growing this winter squash: 1) Having the space to grow them [ideally 1,000 square feet per plant for giant types, 50 to 100 square feet for regular-size varieties, and about 15 to 36 square feet for miniature types] and 2) having a long growing season [generally 75 to 100 frost-free days]. Growers in northern locations need to plant by late May; in southern states, plant by early July.

Pumpkins do require a lot of nourishment. That said, pumpkins are easy to maintain.

## ADVERTISEMENT

*Of autumn's wine, now drink your fill;  
The frost's on the pumpkin, and snow's on the  
hill.*

-*The Old Farmer's Almanac*, 1993

#### Read Next

- [How to Grow a Giant Pumpkin](#)
- [How to Grow Winter Squash Plants: The Complete Guide](#)
- [How to Grow Potatoes: The Complete Guide](#)

## PLANTING

Pumpkins are heavy feeders! It's crucial to mix aged manure and/or compost into the soil. Learn more about [preparing the soil for planting](#).

## When to Plant Pumpkins

Pumpkins are sensitive to the cold. Do not sow seeds directly until **well after** the danger of frost is past and the soil has thoroughly warmed to a temperature between 65° and

- Where the growing season is very short, start by sowing indoors in peat pots, 2 to 4 weeks before the last spring frost. Then, harden off seedlings before transplanting into warm, aged manure/compost-enriched soil.
- Want pumpkins in time for Halloween? Plant in the North from late May and in the extreme South from early July. Look at the seed packet for how many days until harvest. Count backward from a week or so before Halloween. Don't plant too early or they're rot!

## How to Plant Pumpkins

- Vining pumpkins require a minimum of 50 to 100 square feet per hill. If you are short on space, ensure the vines are directed to the outer edge of the garden bed.
- Sow seeds either in rows 8 feet apart or plant in hills 4 feet apart. A hill does not mean the soil has to be mounded; it's a spot containing a group of plants or seeds. However, mounded hills warm soil quickly (so seeds germinate faster) and aid with drainage and pest control. Prepare hills by digging down 12 to 15 inches and mixing/filling in with lots of aged manure and/or compost.

to one plant every 18 to 36 inches.

- In hills, set seeds 1 inch deep with 4 or 5 seeds per hill. Keep seeds moist until germination. When seedlings are 2 to 3 inches tall, thin to two or three plants per hill by snipping out unwanted plants.

Plant miniature varieties one inch deep, with two or three seeds every 2 feet in the row.

Rows should be 6 to 8 feet apart, with seedlings thinned to the best plant every 2 feet when they have their first true leaves.

**In this video, Ben shows us his method for growing pumpkins!**

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## How to Grow Plump Pumpkins



### GROWING

- Use row covers to protect plants early in the season and to prevent insect problems. However, remember to remove covers before flowering to allow pollination.
- Bees are essential for pollination, so be mindful when using insecticides to kill bugs or fungicides to control fungi. If you must use it, apply only in the late afternoon or early evening, when blossoms are closed for the day. To attract more bees, try placing a bee house in your garden. Or, grow colorful flowers near the patch.
- Pumpkins need 1 inch of water per week. Water deeply, in the morning and on very hot afternoons, especially during fruit set. Avoid watering foliage and fruit unless it's a sunny day. Dampness invites rot and disease.
- Add mulch around your pumpkins to retain moisture, suppress weeds, and

- Weed gently; pumpkins have shallow roots that can be easily damaged. Also, take care not to damage the delicate vines; the quality of the fruit depends on them.
- Side-dress with aged manure or compost mixed with water.
- Small vine varieties can be trained to grow up a trellis. Larger varieties can be trained upward, too, to support the fruit, usually with netting or old stockings.
- Pumpkins are heavy feeders. Side-dress with aged manure or compost mixed with water. When plants are about 1 foot tall, just before vines begin to run, fertilize regularly with a high-nitrogen formula. Just before the blooming period, switch to a high-phosphorus formula fertilizer.
- If your first flowers aren't forming fruits, that's normal. Both male and female blossoms need to open. Be patient.

## How to Grow a Bigger Pumpkin

- After a few pumpkins have formed, pinch off the fuzzy ends of each vine to stop vine growth and focus plant energy on the fruit.
- Pruning the vines may help with space and fruit formation. Pumpkins produce main vines (from the base /center of the plant).

may have flowers. Once the fruit has developed, prune the main and secondary vines to 10 to 15 feet and remove the tertiary vines, if desired. Bury the cut tips in the soil.

- Or, gardeners looking for a “prize for size” pumpkin might select 2 or 3 prime candidates and remove all other fruit and vines.
- As the fruit develops, turn them—with great care not to hurt the vine or stem—to encourage an even shape. Slip a thin board or stone or piece of plastic mesh under pumpkins to protect them from rotting on the soil.
- To grow a giant pumpkin, try ‘Dill’s Atlantic Giant’ jumbo variety. Fruit can grow to 200 pounds on 25-foot vines. Plants need 130 to 160 days to mature, so start seedlings indoors, then thin to the best 1 or 2 to plants.
- Feed heavily and cultivate shallowly.
- Remove the first two or three female flowers to generate more leaf surface before a plant sets fruit.
- Allow one fruit to develop. Remove all other female flowers.
- Ensure the vine does not root down near the joints to avoid breakage.
- Learn more about growing prize-

**Make the Most of Your Available Space**

See how many plants will fit and which crops can occupy the same space in your garden at different times of the year.



Pumpkin (6 plants) - row length: 19' 6"

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## Types

Every pumpkin has a best purpose. When choosing a pumpkin, think about what you want to do with it. All pumpkins are technically edible, but ornamentals are better for carving, and other pumpkins are best for cooking.

### Miniature Pumpkins

Miniature pumpkins are very productive and easy to grow, sometimes producing up to a dozen fruits per plant.

- **'Jack Be Little'**, a miniature variety, is dual purpose. Store-bought shiny (painted) ones make an ideal decoration for a holiday table. Remove the seeds from farm- or home-grown specimens and then bake them for a tiny treat. Vine variety. Days to maturity: 90 to 100 days.
- **'We-B-Little'** is an All-America Selection winner, and **'Munchkin'** is another great miniature pumpkin.

- ‘**Autumn Gold**’ is great for carving and decorating. All-America Selection winner. Vine variety. Excellent for Jack-o-Lanterns. Days to maturity are generally 100 to 120 days.
- The larger ‘**Magic Lantern**’ and ‘**Merlin**’ are great for carving and decorating.

## Giant Pumpkins

- ‘**Dill’s Atlantic Giant**’ jumbo variety can grow to 200 pounds. Great for those who want to grow a giant pumpkin. Vines will spread to 25 feet, so space is a must. Days to maturity are 130 to 160 days, so plant early! Thin to the best one or two plants. Feed heavily but keep cultivation shallow. Remove the first 2 or 3 female flowers after the plants start to bloom so that the plants grow larger with more leaf surface before setting fruit. Allow a single fruit to develop and pick off all female flowers that develop after this fruit has been set on the plant. Take care that the vine doesn’t root down near the joints to avoid breakage.
- ‘**Big Max**’, ‘**Big Moon**’, ‘**Jack O’ Lantern**’, and ‘**Funny Face**’ are some of the best giant pumpkins for carving.

## Perfect Pumpkins for Pies

to 120 days. ‘**Hijinks**’ and ‘**Baby Bear**’ are both All-America Selection winners and have sweet flesh for pumpkin pie.

- ‘**Cinderella’s Carriage**’ is also perfect for pies or soups.
- ‘**Peanut Pumpkin**’ also produces very sweet flesh and can be great in pumpkin pie or pumpkin puree.



*Image: Arina P Habich/Shutterstock*

### Colorful Decorative Pumpkins

- ‘**Jarrahdale**’ has blue-green skin and makes for great decorations.
- ‘**Pepitas Pumpkin**’ is orange and green.
- ‘**Super Moon**’ is a large white pumpkin.

## HARVESTING

Your best bet is to harvest pumpkins when they are fully mature—and not before. They will keep best this way. Do not pick pumpkins

desired size. (If you want small pumpkins, grow a small variety.)

- Harvest on a dry day after the plants have died back and the skins are hard.
- The skin of a ripening pumpkin turns a deep, solid color (orange for most varieties), and the stem hardens.
- Thump the pumpkin with a finger; the rind will feel hard and sound hollow. Press a fingernail into the pumpkin's skin; if it resists puncture, it is ripe.
- Carefully cut the fruit off the vine with a sharp knife or pruners; do not tear it. Be sure not to cut too close to the pumpkin. Leave 3 to 4 inches of stem to increase its keeping time.
- Handle pumpkins very gently, or they may bruise. Never carry a pumpkin by its stem.

## How to Cure, Store, and Display Pumpkins

- To toughen the skin and intensify flavor, cure pumpkins in a sunny spot for about 10 days in an area that is 80° to 85° F, with 80 to 85% humidity. This is a great time to display your pumpkin on the front porch! If you're carving a pumpkin, carve no more than 3 days before Halloween, or the

- After curing, store pumpkins in a cool, dry cellar or root cellar or the like at 50° to 55°F for 2 to 3 months.
- Properly saved seeds should last for 6 years.

Check out [this video for tips on curing and storing pumpkins.](#)

## GARDENING PRODUCTS



## PESTS/DISEASES

Be aware that poor light, too much fertilizer, poor weather at bloom time, and reduced pollinating insect activity can result in poor fruit set, shape, and excessive blossom drop.

Pest/Disease	Type	Symptoms	Control/Prevention
<u><a href="#">Anthracnose</a></u>	Fungus	Yellow/brown/purple/black spots on leaves; sunken, dark spots on stems and fruit; spots may develop a salmon-pink, gelatinous mass; eventually, rot	Destroy infected plants; choose resistant varieties; provide good drainage; avoid overhead watering; apply compost; use mulch; rotate crops
<u><a href="#">Aphids</a></u>	Insect	Misshapen/yellow leaves; distorted flowers/fruit; sticky "honeydew" (excrement); sooty, black mold	Grow <u><a href="#">companion plants</a></u> ; knock off with water spray; apply insecticidal soap; put banana or orange peels around plants; wipe leaves with a 1 to 2 percent solution of dish soap (no additives) and water every 2 to 3 days for 2 weeks; add native plants to invite <u><a href="#">beneficial insects</a></u>
<u><a href="#">Blossom-end rot</a></u>	Disorder	Dark, water-soaked spots on blossom end of fruit (opposite stem) may enlarge and become sunken and leathery	Caused by lack of calcium in fruit, often due to roots failing to obtain sufficient water and/or nutrients. Remove affected fruit; plant at

Pest/Disease	Type	Symptoms	Control/Prevention
			mulch; maintain proper soil pH (around 6.5) and nutrient levels; avoid excessive nitrogen; provide good drainage; prevent root damage
<u>Cucumber beetles</u>	Insect	Holes in leaves/flowers; rasped fruit; plants stunted/die	Handpick; mulch heavily; use row covers; destroy plants infected with bacterial wilt (Bacterial wilt signs: wilting; plants die; ends of cut stems, when pressed together for 10 seconds and pulled apart, release stringy, white sap)
<u>Downy mildew</u>	Fungus	Yellow, angular spots on upper leaf surfaces that turn brown; white/purple/gray cottony growth on leaf undersides only; distorted leaves; defoliation	Remove plant debris; choose resistant varieties; ensure good air circulation; avoid overhead watering
<u>Powdery mildew</u>	Fungus	Typically, white spots on upper leaf surfaces ex-	Destroy infected leaves or plants;

Pest/Disease	Type	Symptoms	Control/Prevention
		distortion/stunting of leaves/flowers	ensure good air circulation; spray plants with 1 teaspoon baking soda dissolved in 1 quart water; destroy crop residue
<u>Mosaic virus (cucumber)</u>	Virus	Varies with plant, but may include stunting, mottled green/yellow/white pattern or ringed spots on leaves/fruit; distorted leaf growth; warts on fruit	Destroy infected plants; choose resistant varieties and certified virus-free seed; use row covers; disinfect tools; weed; control aphids; use mulch
<u>Stinkbugs</u>	Insect	Yellow/white blotches on leaves; eggs, often keg-shape, in clusters on leaf undersides	Destroy crop residue; handpick (bugs emit odor, wear gloves); destroy eggs; spray nymphs with insecticidal soap; use row covers; weed; till soil in fall
<u>Squash bugs</u>	Insect	Many small, yellow/brown/black spots on leaves; wilt; scarred fruit	Handpick; crush yellow/bronze egg clusters on leaf undersides; lay boards on soil and check for pests underneath each

Pest/Disease	Type	Symptoms	Control/Prevention
			row covers; rotate crops
<u>Squash vine borer</u>	Insect	Vines wilt suddenly; plants die; mushy area and /or green to orange-yellow, sawdust-like excrement on/near base of plant stem	If detected early, slit infested stem lengthwise halfway to remove borer larvae, then bury the cut in moist soil to encourage rooting; wrap seedling stems in aluminum foil collar; catch moths with yellow sticky traps; use row covers if no pests previously, but uncover before flowering; destroy crop residue; rotate crops

## WIT AND WISDOM

### Pumpkin Trivia

- A slice of pumpkin pie before bedtime may help you to sleep.
- Pumpkins were once thought to cure snakebites.
- Pumpkins have been grown in North America for almost 5,000 years.

- Pumpkin halves were once used as guides for haircuts in colonial days, giving rise to the nickname “pumpkinhead.”

## Carving Pumpkins

- Pumpkins are a popular decorating for fall holidays in the United States. Read more about [Halloween](#).
- Inscribe messages on growing pumpkins with a large nail. The letters will scar over while the pumpkins grow and will still be visible at harvest time.
- [See five tips for picking the perfect pumpkin for carving!](#)

## RECIPES

PUMPKIN PANCAKES

BROWNED BUTTER FROSTED PUMPKIN BARS

BLUE RIBBON PUMPKIN PIE

SOUTHWESTERN PUMPKIN HUMMUS

## COOKING NOTES

- See how to [clean a pumpkin for cooking](#).
- Don't forget about the seeds! Roast them with salt or cinnamon for a tasty treat.

### VEGETABLES

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Catherine Boeckmann



Catherine Boeckmann loves nature, stargazing, and gardening so it's not surprising that she and The Old Farmer's Almanac found each other. She leads digital content for the Almanac website, and is also a certified master gardener in the state of Indiana. [Read More from Catherine Boeckmann](#)

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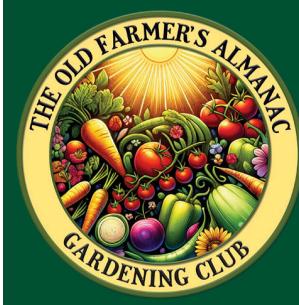
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## COMMENTS

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**SunnyDaysPNW (not verified)** 7 months 3 weeks

ago

Thank you for such a thorough article & accompanying resources.

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I have done some research regarding planting in grassed over fields & haven't found any pros/cons, hoping to learn about how to use the resources I have. I'm disabled & unable to do a lot of manual labor- such as digging out new garden beds/fields. I do have a horse pasture that receives 80% southern exposure daylight & aprx 10-15% shade from tall forest mid morning throughout Summer. The pasture is fallow & manure aged. Would pumpkins do well if I dug out larger planting holes, place aged compost, bonemeal, and soil into holes, fertilize regularly with fish emulsion, and let the vines ramble?

This ground drains easily, yet my plants stay healthy. Do I need to worry about grass possibly trapping moisture on the pumpkins? Are there other risks with grass that I should know? Will this equate to larger battles with insects/blights/etc?

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REPLY

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**Olivia (not verified)** 1 year 6 months ago

It seems to me that in the autumn this issue becomes especially relevant. Pumpkin season is just beginning, and Halloween is approaching, everyone will be carving scary decorations out of pumpkins for their home, and you can always plant seeds. I already had this experience at one time, but it didn't work out the first time.

REPLY

---

**Ali (not verified)** 1 year 6 months ago

I really enjoyed reading this article about pumpkins! It was informative and engaging. I especially liked the list of different ways to use pumpkins. I'm always looking for new and creative ways to use this versatile vegetable.

{Pumpkins} are a fall favorite for a reason. They're versatile, delicious, and nutritious. They can be used in sweet or savory dishes, and they're a great source of vitamins, minerals, and fiber.

REPLY

**Erin (not verified)** 2 years ago

At the beginning of this article you say that ideally 1 pumpkin plant would have 1,000 square feet of space to grow. Is that correct? That seems excessive.

**REPLY**

**The Editors** 1 year 12 months ago

Hi, Erin,

Thank you for bringing this to our attention! The 1,000 square feet of growing space would be for the giant pumpkin varieties. We have revised the copy to also include spacing for regular-size and miniature types. Thanks again!

**REPLY**

**Sarah O (not verified)** 2 years 7 months ago

I have a pumpkin that's a year old! Kept it inside the house during the winter months and then put it outside this summer!! It's still in great shape, solid and heavy!! How can

... 1 200

[REPLY](#)**Wylie (not verified)** 2 years 9 months ago

Thanks for the great info about pumpkin growing! I have an issue with two pumpkin varieties I'm growing in different raised beds, I'm wondering if you might have any advice. I've been waiting for the female flowers to come up. I finally saw them budding up on my vines but after a few days, they turn yellow and pop off the vine. Am I not fertilizing enough maybe? Thanks again!

[REPLY](#)**The Editors** 2 years 9 months ago

Hi, Wylie, Lots of things can cause lack of pollination. Some of the most common causes are lack of pollinators; weather, specifically extreme heat or cold temps. Varieties differ in their reaction to temp changes. Nitrogen levels in the soil can also affect fruit set. Excess nitrogen results in vigorous vine growth and delays flowering. You might do a soil test to assess its composition. We hope this helps!

**Cathy (not verified)** 3 years ago

The Rouge Vif D'Etampes pumpkin is a gorgeous shape and color, is delicious and a keeper! And has been around a long time.

**REPLY**

---

**Shawn Ashkenasy (not verified)** 3 years 6

months ago

Second year into gardening.

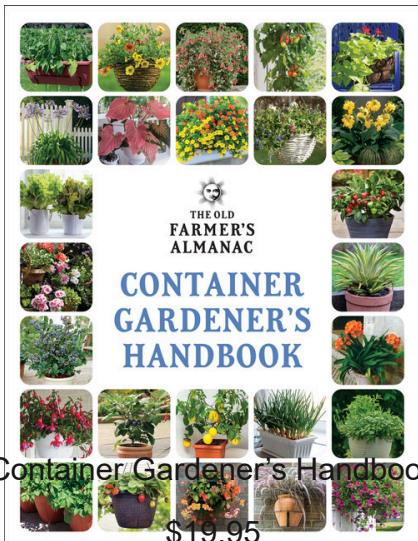
Last year I used a Max seed which produced a strong vine and flowered but no fruit.

This year thanks to some great tips from this site and learning about the Jarrahale pumpkin I planed and am still harvesting the pumpkins. The Jarrahale seems to be a great pumpkin to eat and it is decorative.

Question: my first last frost should be Jan 12 or 21 cannot remember. Could I plant the seeds for next year in January? Would it matter about growing a larger pumpkin?

**REPLY**

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