



The Phantom Gardener

Organic from the start, sustainable for the future

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Pumpkins

Everyone loves pumpkins. In addition to being the classic fall decorations, many varieties are perfect for eating, too! Pumpkins range in size from tiny ones the size of your palm to contest-winning giants. Some varieties were bred for eating the flesh, some for their edible seeds, and some for carving jack-o-lanterns, so read descriptions to choose the best one for your needs. The plants themselves tend to be large, though bush varieties are available that take up less garden space.

1. Prepare. Loosen soil to a depth of 8 to 10 inches using a shovel or tiller. Mix in some compost or slow-release fertilizer to provide plants with nutrients. Then rake the soil smooth, removing any large clumps and rocks.

2. Plant. Most pumpkin varieties form long vines so give them plenty of room. Sow seeds in a row, about an inch deep and 6 inches apart. Or, plant them in hills (flat-topped mounds), sowing 4 to 6 seeds in a 3-foot-diameter hill. To plant, either poke a hole with your finger and place the seed in the hole, or use a hoe to create a shallow furrow. Cover seed with soil and press gently.

3. Grow. Once seedlings are a few inches tall, thin them by removing extra plants so the remaining ones are 2 to 3 feet apart, or 1 or 2 plants per hill. Water soil to keep it moist. Pull weeds that sprout nearby. Apply organic mulch to control weeds and conserve soil moisture, keeping the mulch an inch or two from stems.

4. Enjoy. Wait to harvest pumpkins until the vine begins to die back. (However, if freezing temperatures are expected, harvest early if necessary.) To prepare edible varieties, halve them (carefully!), scoop out the seeds, and steam or bake. Remove the rind and enjoy in casseroles or pureed.

At a glance

Exposure:
Full sun

Planting time:
After last spring frost
(usually around May
15th)

Planting depth:
1 inch deep

Spacing in row:
6 inches apart; thin to
2 feet apart or 2 to 3
plants per hill

Time to harvest:
75 to 120 days,
depending on variety.

