

Growing Pumpkins

The most common pumpkins are varieties of *Cucurbita pepo*. The large-fruited pumpkins, weighing up to 400 lb, belong to the species *Cucurbita maxima*. The name squash is often interchanged with that of pumpkin. Most varieties that are called pumpkin bear orange fruit, have very long vines, and have stems that are firmer, more rigid, and squarer than those of other squashes. Pumpkin is a warm-season vegetable that can be grown throughout much of the United States. Besides being used as jack-o'-lanterns at Halloween, pumpkins are used to make pumpkin butter, pies, custard, bread, cookies and soup.

When to Plant

Pumpkin is a very tender vegetable. The seeds do not germinate in cold soil, and the seedlings are injured by frost. Do not plant until all danger of frost has passed, and the soil has thoroughly warmed. Plant pumpkins for Halloween from late May in northern locations to early July in extremely southern sites. If pumpkins are planted too early, they may soften and rot before Halloween.

Harvesting

Pumpkins can be harvested whenever they are a deep, solid color (orange for most varieties) and the rind is hard. If vines remain healthy, harvest in late September or early October, before heavy frosts. If vines die prematurely from disease or other causes, harvest the mature fruit and store them in a moderately warm, dry place until Halloween. Cut pumpkins from the vines carefully, using pruning shears or a sharp knife and leave 3 to 4 inches of stem attached. Snapping the stems from the vines results in many broken or missing "handles." Pumpkins without stems usually do not keep well. Wear gloves when harvesting fruit because many varieties have sharp prickles on their stems.

Avoid cutting and bruising the pumpkins when handling them. Fruits that are not fully mature or that have been injured or subjected to heavy frost do not keep. Store in a dry building where the temperature is between 50 and 55°F.

Pumpkin History

References to pumpkins date back many centuries. The name pumpkin originated from the Greek word for "large melon" which is "pepon." "Pepon" was nasalized by the French into "pompon." The English changed "pompon" to "Pumpion." Shakespeare referred to the "pumpion" in his *Merry Wives of Windsor*. American colonists changed "pumpion" into "pumpkin." The "pumpkin" is referred to in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, *Peter, Peter, Pumpkin Eater* and *Cinderella*.

Native Americans dried strips of pumpkin and wove them into mats. They also roasted long strips of pumpkin on the open fire and ate them. The origin of pumpkin pie occurred when the colonists sliced off the pumpkin top, removed the seeds, and filled the insides with milk, spices and honey. The pumpkin was then baked in hot ashes.

Carving Pumpkins

Without a doubt the most recognizable symbol of Halloween is a pumpkin carved into a jack-o-lantern. Before jack-o-lanterns were carved out of pumpkins they were carved from turnips or gourds and set on porches and in windows to welcome deceased loved ones, but also to act as protection against evil spirits. Burning lumps of coal were used inside as a source of light, later replaced by candles.

Depending on the local weather conditions during the month of October, a carved pumpkin can have a life span of anywhere from a week to only a day. The key to keeping a jack-o-lantern longer is to slow down the dehydration process and deter the on-set of mold. When pumpkins shrivel up, it's because they have lost moisture. You can sometimes restore pumpkins back to their original condition by soaking them in water overnight. One technique is to coat all cut surfaces of the pumpkin with petroleum jelly immediately after they have been carved. This includes a light coating of the entire inside of the

pumpkin. If you can't do the whole inside, at least try to coat the design that you've cut into the pumpkin. The petroleum jelly acts as a barrier to seal in the pumpkins internal moisture to help slow down the dehydration process of the pumpkin. You can use a finger to coat the eyes, nose and mouth but you may want to use a paper towel with jelly on it to coat the inside. Keeping pumpkins in a dry, shaded area during the day will help extend their life.

Pumpkin Nutrition

The bright orange color of pumpkin is a dead giveaway that pumpkin is loaded with an important antioxidant, beta-carotene. Beta-carotene is one of the plant carotenoids converted to vitamin A in the body. In the conversion to vitamin A, beta carotene performs many important functions in overall health. Current research indicates that a diet rich in foods containing beta-carotene may reduce the risk of developing certain types of cancer and offers protect against heart disease. Beta-carotene offers protection against other diseases as well as some degenerative aspects of aging.

Pumpkin Facts

- Pumpkin seeds can be roasted as a snack
- Pumpkins contain potassium and Vitamin A
- Pumpkins are used for feed for animals
- Pumpkin flowers are edible
- Pumpkins are used to make soups, pies and breads
- The largest pumpkin pie ever made was over five feet in diameter and weighed over 350 pounds. It used 80 pounds of cooked pumpkin, 36 pounds of sugar, 12 dozen eggs and took six hours to bake
- Pumpkins are members of the vine crops family called cucurbits
- Pumpkins originated in Central America
- In early colonial times, pumpkins were used as an ingredient for the crust of pies, not the filling
- Pumpkins were once recommended for removing freckles and curing snake bites
- Pumpkins range in size from less than a pound to over 1,000 pounds
- The largest pumpkin ever grown weighed 1,140 pounds
The name pumpkin originated from "pepon" - the Greek word for "large melon"
- The Connecticut field variety is the traditional American pumpkin
- Pumpkins are 90 percent water
- Pumpkins are fruit
- Eighty percent of the pumpkin supply in the United States is available in October
- In colonial times, Native Americans roasted long strips of pumpkin in an open fire
- Colonists sliced off pumpkin tips; removed seeds and filled the insides with milk, spices and honey. This was baked in hot ashes and is the origin of pumpkin pie
- Native Americans flattened strips of pumpkins, dried them and made mats
- Native Americans called pumpkins "isqoutm squash"
- Native Americans used pumpkin seeds for food and medicine

For Teachers I found some websites that help teach Pumpkin Education.

- Museums in the Classroom Pumpkin Project
<http://www.chias.org/www/edu/mitc/wkshp/pumpkin/pumpkin.html> Hands-on educational pumpkin activity developed by teachers at a workshop sponsored by the Chicago Academy of Sciences.
- Pump Up the Curriculum With Pumpkins! http://www.education-world.com/a_lesson/lesson028.shtml Try pumpkin science, math and writing.

- Pumpkin Lesson Plans & Thematic Units <http://atozteacherstuff.com/themes/pumpkins.shtml>
Harvest a crop of learning with real pumpkins
- Pumpkin Homework http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/curriculum/socialstd/FT/Pumpkin_letter.html
How to measure a pumpkin with kindergartners.
- Pumpkin Exploration <http://www.sedl.org/scimath/compass/v01n02/pumpkin.html> The size, color, smell and taste of pumpkins make them perfect for this elementary observation and exploration activity.
- Pumpkin Circle Project <http://www.pumpkincircle.com> The Pumpkin Circle Project includes an award-winning video and picture book. Together they present and celebrate the amazing cycle of nature unfolding in a backyard pumpkin patch.

MGT-332: Agriculture and Food Vulnerability Assessment Training

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), WV Department of Military Affairs and Public Safety (DMAPS), WV Department of Agriculture, and the Jefferson County Development Authority are offering free Agriculture and Food Vulnerability Assessment Training through the DHS Direct Delivery Program. This training, which has been certified and approved by DHS/FEMA, will strengthen the ability of state and local communities and industry to improve intelligence and operational capabilities for prevention and deterrence of terrorist acts that target the agriculture and food sector.

This is a one and one-half day class that is open to the agriculture and food industry, federal, state, county, and local officials, extension and crop specialists, agriculture crime units, food processors, food transportation, food wholesalers and retailers, food distributors, health department officials, emergency managements agencies, meat and poultry inspection and all others involved with food and agriculture security planning.

When: November 10-11, 2009-- Beginning at 8:00 a.m. on November 10 and conclude at approximately 4:30 p.m. Class will resume at 8:00 on November 11 and conclude at approximately 12:00 p.m.

Where: West Virginia University Tree Fruit Research and Education Center, 67 Apple Harvest Lane (Located On WV Route 9 in Jefferson County), Kearneysville, West Virginia 25403

Cost: No program fee. Lunch will be provided. WV Law Enforcement Training Committee has approved for 12 hours law enforcement in service hours. Travel and Lodging will be the responsibility of the attendee with NO reimbursement. Registration Deadline is Wednesday November 4, 2009.

If you have any questions or require any assistance please contact Roy McCallister or Matt Blackwood, (304)-558-2214 or rmccallister@ag.state.wv.us

Master Gardener Program Tuesday November 10, 2009

Kay Byers a Berkeley/Jefferson County Master Gardener will offer a class on Tool Care and Sharpening on Tuesday November 10, 2009 at the WVU Kearneysville Tree Fruit Research and Education Center at 7 PM. Come out and learn what you should do to help make your garden tools last longer and work better.

Garden Tips

Remove stakes and trellises

Fertilize under deciduous trees

Mulch carrots for winter use

Water trees and shrubs thoroughly if fall has been dry

Remember to turn your clocks back - Daylight Saving Time Ends Sunday morning

Remember to test your soil before adding fertilizer so you do not waste your money

Until next time ...Happy Gardening and Farming!