



4-H Pumpkin Growing

Steps to growing a pumpkin

1. Sow Seeds

Start seed indoors in six-inch peat pots. Plant the seed with the pointed end of the seed facing down. Keep the soil temperature at 85 to 90oF. Most seeds will emerge within five days.

2. Transplant Seedlings

Transplant seedlings into the garden once the first true leaves appear or when roots begin to grow through the peat pot (usually seven to 10 days after germination). Handle with care because pumpkins are easily set back during transplanting.

3. Flowers

Eight to 10 weeks after seed starting, the flowers will appear. This is the start of your pumpkin. Protect that flower.

4. Reposition Set Pumpkins

Once a pumpkin has set, its position on the vine becomes extremely important. Most often the stem grows at a very acute angle to the vine. However, for optimal long-term growth, the best position is to have the stem perpendicular to the vine. If yours is not at right angles to the vine naturally, coax it gradually, over about a week's time, until it is in that position. Be careful, because at this early stage pumpkins may still abort or you may injure the fragile stem.

5. Select the Most Promising Pumpkin

If one plant has three strong vines, you could have as many as seven or eight pumpkins set and growing. Now you must choose the best pumpkin and remove most of the rest. Measure each pumpkin's circumference at the widest point weekly or daily with a cloth measuring tape. Choose the one that's growing fastest. Also, keep an eye out for the optimum shape. Young pumpkins that are round and especially tall grow the largest.

6. Prune Vines

Begin pruning vines early in the season to discourage random growth and an out-of-control patch. Prune each main vine when it has reached 10 to 12 feet beyond a set fruit. If you have a pumpkin on a vine that is 10 feet from the main root, cut the end of that vine once it is 20 to 24 feet long. Let side shoots off the main vines get no longer than eight feet before cutting off tips. Train side shoots so they are perpendicular to the main vine to accommodate access to the vines and pumpkins. Bury the ends of cut vines to reduce water loss.

7. Fertilize

During the growing season, most fertility needs of pumpkins can be met by applying water-soluble plant foods once or twice a week over the entire plant area. Apply water-soluble fertilizer at the rate of one to two pounds per week per plant f fruit set until the end of the growing season. Some competitive growers will err on the side of over fertilization. But too much fertilizer can hurt more than help. If the pumpkins start growing too fast, they will literally tear themselves from the vine and explode.

8. Keep Track

Measure your pumpkins at least weekly. Gains in circumference can average four to six inches in a 24-hour period. Measure the circumference of your pumpkins first parallel to the ground around the entire pumpkin, from blossom end to stem. Next, measure over the top in both directions: from ground to ground along the axis from stem to blossom end, then perpendicular to the stem-blossom-end axis. Add these three measurements together, then multiply by 1.9 to give an estimate of the pumpkin's weight.

9. Pests

Pumpkins are a favorite food of quite a few insects, and pests on pumpkins can be a real problem. Most, however, are treatable or at least preventable. Use a fungicide for disease control according to the rate and schedule on the bottle label. Check the label for the rate and spray schedule needed. It is very important to follow all label directions carefully.