



THE LANDSCAPE CONSULTANTS

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How to Grow a Giant Pumpkin

Growing a winning giant pumpkin takes more than just planting the seed and then watching it grow.

In the fall or early spring add two to five yards per plant of compost or rotted manure (use chicken manure sparingly and only in the fall). Pumpkins tend to be heavy feeders and require all of the major nutrients (nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium) plus many minor nutrients like calcium and magnesium. A crop cover of fall rye that can be plowed down in spring is great for building nutrients in the soil. The pH level in the soil should be 6.5 to 6.8 for happy pumpkins. In the fall test the soil and make adjustments to bring the pH in line. Add sulfur to lower and lime to raise the pH levels.

Start your seeds indoors in peat pots about four weeks before the last frost is expected. Plant the seed with the pointed end down in the pot. Keep the pots in a warm location where the temperature is 85-90 degree F; most seeds will have germinated within five days. You can transplant the seedlings outside after the first true leaves have emerged; this will be approximately seven to 10 days after germination. Make sure to handle the seedlings with care as they can be set back easily.

It is important for the next six weeks to protect the plants from the frost and wind. They will need to be covered with a small greenhouse (these can be easily put together by placing two windows nailed together to form a teepee or making a 1x2 wood mini-greenhouse). At about the eight to 10 week mark, the first female flowers will appear. These will be the flowers with the small pumpkins at their base. If you want to get a real early start to growing your pumpkins, then you may want to consider hand pollination. In the early morning go out into the garden and locate a freshly opened male flower and remove the outer petals. Then find a freshly opened female flower and gently swab the stigma (internal part) with the pollen-laden stamen. If you can get your pumpkins set before July 10, then the longer growing period they will have to become those mighty giants.

Making sure the pumpkin is in the right growing position is very important for long-term growth. The best position to have the stem is perpendicular to the vine. This may take a little gentle coaxing over a week's time to get the pumpkin in the right position. Be careful not to damage the fragile stem.

To make sure you grow the best pumpkin to its largest size it can grow to, you must select out the pumpkins that you think are strongest and remove most of the rest. Check the growth of your pumpkins by measuring the pumpkin daily to see which ones grow the fastest and of course has the best shape, this will help you to select the right ones to keep.

Prune your vines so they do not get out of control. Prune back each of the main vines when they have grown 10-12 feet beyond the set fruit. Don't let the side shoots get any longer than about eight feet.

Apply a water soluble plant food such as 15-30-15 to the seedlings then move to a 20-20-20 once the fruit is set, and then use a high potassium fertilizer after late July until the end of the growing season.

Measure your pumpkins weekly, as gains in the circumference of 4 to 6 inches in a 24-hour period can easily happen. If you measure the circumference of your pumpkin first parallel to the ground around the entire pumpkin, from blossom end to stem. Then over the top in both directions, from ground to ground along the axis from stem to blossom end, and then perpendicular to the stem-blossom-end axis. Add the three measurements together and multiply by 1.9 this will give you the estimated weight of your pumpkin.