



Pumpkins need to be irrigated regularly, so why not conserve by using grey water or a rain barrel? Mulches aren't recommended because they cool the soil and slow growth.



It's hard to imagine autumn in Canada without the omnipresent orange pumpkin. Thanksgiving dinner just wouldn't be the same without Grandma's pumpkin pie, and the Halloween jack-o'-lantern has become all but obligatory for most families.

But in addition to the standard orange type, there are many specialty varieties you can grow yourself, from minis (no larger than a baseball) to giants weighing more than 665 kilograms; and if you're tired of orange, how about orange with black stripes, or cultivars that produce fruit with scarlet, white or grey rinds?

Pumpkins belong to the genus *Cucurbita*, which also includes cucumbers, gourds, melons, zucchini and squash. Native primarily to Mexico and Central America, they've been cultivated for thousands of years, though cultivars of just three species produce the fruit we would recognize as a "pumpkin."

Most standard orange ones belong to the species *C. pepo*, from which we also derive acorn, crookneck and spaghetti squash, as well as zucchini. Likewise, *C. moschata*, which includes several black-and-tan pumpkins, also contains butternut squash, while *C. maxima* includes buttercup and hubbard squash in addition to those mammoth pumpkins so popular at fall fairs.

All pumpkins are grown from seed and require full sun and soil with a pH level between 6.5 and 7.5. The space each plant needs depends on the cultivar: gardeners with small plots should opt for semi-bush varieties, such as 'Wee-B-Little', while those with an unlimited area can contemplate preparing the seven square metres they'll need to cultivate a single 'Dill's Atlantic Giant' vine. Maturity times also vary—anywhere from 85 to 125 days—so choose a cultivar compatible with your growing zone.



'JARRAHDALE'

Although pumpkins produce a taproot for stability, the fibrous roots that take up the majority of water and nutrients remain within the top 25 centimetres of soil.

Gardeners in warmer areas (Zones 7 and up) can plant seeds directly into the soil, but for the rest of us, it's best to start them indoors in containers using a sterile seed-starting mixture (plant them 2.5 centimetres deep). The soil temperature should be between 22 and 35°C for optimal germination, which takes five to 10 days in a bright window.

As soon as the soil outdoors reaches 22°C, it's safe to transplant the seedlings. Vine-type pumpkins should be planted on raised hills (about the size of an overturned bushel basket). The soil in the mound will warm up more quickly than at ground level. Semi-bush-type pumpkins don't need to be planted on mounds but may require some staking.

Because pumpkins are heavy feeders, the soil around each should be enriched with plenty of compost and composted manure at a ratio of two parts garden soil, one part



compost and one part composted manure.

Within 21 days, the plants will begin to produce male flowers, which bear pollen. A week to 10 days later, female flowers (which are easy to identify because an ovary at the base of the flower looks like a miniature pumpkin) will appear. Fortunately, there is an overlap when both male and female flowers are present, so sit back and let the bees do their thing. As soon as fertilization has occurred, the ovary will begin to swell, eventually metamorphosing into a mature pumpkin.

All pumpkins require regular irrigation—and plenty of it (at least five centimetres per week); plants that don't receive enough moisture will abort their fruit. Keep the patch well wooded. Pumpkins are ready to harvest when their rind reaches the requisite colour and becomes hard to the touch, often after several light frosts. Few serious diseases or insect problems plague them. Cucumber beetles and powdery mildew may be troublesome in some areas, but can be treated using standard organic control methods. Check with your local Ministry of Agriculture for any problems specific to your region.

Regardless of which type of pumpkin you grow, be sure to involve the kids from seed sowing to harvest: carving your own homegrown pumpkin for Halloween (and perhaps eating a pie made from the leftovers) is certain to create fun-filled, life-long memories. SOURCE GUIDE, PAGE 90



'LONG ISLAND CHEESE'

CULTIVARS TO TRY

NAME*	DAYS TO MATURITY	TYPE	COLOUR	SIZE	COMMENTS
'DILL'S ATLANTIC GIANT' (<i>C. maxima</i>)	120	Specialty	Pale orange	115 kg is common	From the late Howard Dill of Nova Scotia, holds the world's record for largest pumpkin; unsuitable for cooking; fruit is stringy and 90% water
'HOWDEN'	115	Standard	Orange	avg. 11 kg	Developed in the early 1970s; still the most widely grown field pumpkin; firm yellow flesh is excellent for cooking
'JACK-BE-LITTLE'	95	Mini	Orange	7- to 10-cm dia. (285 to 450 g)	Good introductory variety for small children; fine for cooking
'JARRAHDALE' (<i>C. maxima</i>)	100	Specialty	Grey	2.5 to 4.5 kg	Grey fruit is great for display; orange flesh good for cooking
'KAKAI'	100	Specialty	Orange with black stripes	2 to 3.5 kg	Semi-bush; green, hull-less seeds are delicious roasted
'LONG ISLAND CHEESE' (<i>C. moschata</i>)	110	Specialty	Tan	2.5 to 4.5 kg	Heirloom variety with sweet flesh for cooking; stores well
'RACER'	85	Standard	Orange	5.5 to 7.5 kg	Early maturing for colder zones; productive semi-bush type; good quality for cooking when used fresh
'ROUGE VIF D'ETAMPS' (<i>C. maxima</i>)	115	Specialty	Scarlet	4.5 to 7 kg	French variety; good for display and cooking
'VALENCIANO' (<i>C. maxima</i>)	110	Specialty	White	3 to 5 kg	This whitest of the white pumpkins also boasts thick, orange flesh for pies
'WEE-B-LITTLE'	95	Mini	Orange	7- to 9-cm dia. (285 to 400 g)	Semi-bush; another good choice for children; 1999 AAS winner; great for autumn floral arrangements; fine for cooking

*NOTE: All are cultivars of *Cucurbita pepo*, except where noted.