

Growing Giant Pumpkins

In order to grow giant pumpkins you must really aim at growing giant pumpkin vines. Vines that are longer than 20 feet and have leaves a foot or two or even more across. Obviously you must have lots of room to grow vines this size and you need full sun. You also need good soil. While loam is best the soil can be a tad sandy or a tad clayey and still grow huge pumpkins. Another thing you will need is great genetics—this means the pumpkin seed must have come from huge pumpkins. This is why it is important to know the size of the pumpkins the seeds were taken from.

Giant pumpkin seeds are a favorite food of chipmunks, squirrels and field mice. If you plant them directly in your garden you are really taking a chance. Because of this (and also to get them an early start) it is really smart to start them indoors. Start the seeds from 2 to 3 weeks before you feel secure that there won't be a frost. Here are some tips.

- 1 Use a top quality, professional grade of potting mix or seed starting mix. Jiffy, Sunshine, Peter's, the professional grade of Miracle Gro and similar types are suitable. The cheap, heavy potting soil is not suitable.
- 2 Plant the seeds in peat pots that are 3 inches in diameter or larger. Peat pots allow you to plant the pot and all. (Hint: take the bottom off the peat pot before planting.) Cover the seeds with an inch to an inch and a half of soil.
- 3 Keep the soil slightly moist—but not wet—and place the pots in a warm place from 70-85F – the warmer the soil the faster the germination (at least up to 85F).
- 4 As soon as you notice the soil breaking on top, make sure the pots are placed where there is plenty of light. A sunny, south facing window will do. You also can place them a few inches below a shop light's fluorescent bulbs.
- 5 Once the plants get their first two true leaves it's time to plant them outside. Unless you can protect them with a row cover, make sure there is no frost forecasted in the extended weather outlook.
- 6 Use a rototiller or a shovel to dig up the ground where you want to plant the pumpkins. Sprinkle about three cups of a general purpose fertilizer (such as 12-12-12 or 5-10-5) or six pounds of dried cow manure for every 100 square feet of garden space.
- 7 Use a garden hoe or shovel to mix the fertilizer well into the soil.
- 8 Take off the bottom of the peat pot and plant the pot in the soil.
- 9 Water well for the first few days until you notice the plants are growing.

Caring For The Pumpkin Plants

- 10 Watch the plants for any insect pests. Either pick the bugs off (usually cucumber beetles) or spray the plants with an insecticide such as Sevin.
- 11 Water regularly at least once a week. Also if you notice leaves wilting badly in the sun water immediately.
- 12 Regularly use MiracleGro or other soluble fertilizer according to the label.
- 13 Don't let any weeds grow within 5 feet of the pumpkin vine. A garden hoe works great here.

A Few Tricks To Get Really Big Pumpkins

- 1 Don't bother with feeding the vines milk. It doesn't help.
- 2 Pick off all small pumpkins that appear before July 20. Also, remove any deformed pumpkins or pumpkins that are growing slower than the other pumpkins on the vine.
- 3 Since pumpkin vines will root anywhere they contact soil, encourage this by placing some dirt on the vines. However, do not put the dirt within 3 feet of a pumpkin since as the pumpkin grows it has a tendency to lift the vine and the stem has a tendency to crack if the vine is held down by dirt.
- 4 Once a large pumpkin forms, you can get it to grow even larger by making an arrangement so the pumpkin is shaded. Use your imagination here but don't place a tarp on it—the pumpkin needs plenty of air or it will rot.
- 5 Harvest the pumpkins before a hard frost. While the leaves might be killed by a light frost, the pumpkin itself can take light frosts.

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