

SEED SACK GROWING INSTRUCTIONS AND TIPS

Description

400 to 500 pounds is the norm for these heavily ribbed beauties

Days to Maturity: 130

Here it is, the gigantic pumpkin that holds the world's record for size (1,810 pounds) If you want to grow the pumpkin of your dreams, Dill's Atlantic Giant is the variety you must grow.

It's easy to grow 400- to 500-pound golden-orange fruits with this amazing variety. Rough-skinned and beautifully ribbed, the pumpkins just keep going and going at an astonishing rate. You've got to try it for yourself.

Pumpkins are exceptionally easy to grow, given adequate space and patience. Sow the seeds outdoors when danger of frost is past, or start indoors in peat pots. Plant the seedlings (or thin to) 3 to 5 feet apart.

Details

Skip Product Specs

Genus	Cucurbita
Variety	Dill's Atlantic Giant
Days to Maturity	130
Fruit Color	Orange
Habit	Vining
Plant Width	3 ft
Additional Characteristics	Edible
Harvest Season	Early Fall, Late Fall, Late Summer, Mid Fall
Light Requirements	Full Sun
Moisture Requirements	Moist, well-drained
Soil Tolerance	Normal, loamy
Uses	Beds, Cuisine, Ornamental, Outdoor, Vines and Climbers

Tips for How to Grow a Giant Pumpkin

1. **Great pumpkin lineage is key. If you want to grow a giant, you'll need to procure seeds from a previous giant. Johnson and Harp both consider Atlantic Giant seeds to be the best of the best.**
2. **Keep soil constantly moist but not soggy. Harp advises one inch of water per week if you don't get adequate rainfall.**
3. **Cover your pumpkin with a white sheet to protect it, advises Harp.**
4. **Mild temperatures are best for growing pumpkins, with daily temps of 90 and nightly temps in the 60 range.**
5. **Pump up your soil. Use lots and lots of rich compost and treat with fertilizer every other day.**
6. **Prune your plants, says Harp, so energy is directed toward growing the pumpkin and not the vines.**
7. **Grow one pumpkin per plant to make sure that the pumpkin gets the maximum amount of energy, says Harp.**
8. **To protect your pumpkin from rotting, grow it on sand or on mill fabric, which will ensure that water can drain away, says Johnson.**
9. **Plant seeds indoors in late April and transplant in early May to your garden, advises Harp.**
10. **Bury the vines of your pumpkin plant a few inches deep, says Johnson. "The reason for this is to help anchor the plant down in windstorms. But more important, at each leaf node (where the leaf stems come out of the vine) the vine will produce a root out of the top and the bottom of the vine. If you have the vines properly buried you can have the entire planting area covered in roots, which will power the growth of the pumpkin," says Johnson.**

How to Grow a Giant Pumpkin: A Step-By Step Guide

Step One: Prepare your growing space

Giant pumpkin growers recommend preparing your growing area and testing the soil in the fall. Pumpkins do best in soil that is slightly acidic to neutral around 6.5-6.8 pH. Make any amendments needed for the soil. Adding as much organic matter to your soil as possible is important because giant pumpkins are giant eaters. Amending your soil and preparing the grow space in the fall means your soil will be fueled with better organic soil conditions when it is time to plant in the spring. Your pumpkin will need 8-12+ hours of sunlight per day with lots of growing space to spread out. A large area (1000 sq ft or 40 ft diameter for award-winning pumpkins) is recommended.

Step Two: Select Your Seeds

Selecting good pumpkin seeds matter. Because much of a pumpkins size is determined by its genetics you need to choose a seed that corresponds to your desired size. Most award winners originated from the Atlantic Giant pumpkin variety. People who are serious about pumpkin competitions buy and sell individual pumpkin seeds with winning genetics for some lofty prices compared to the average garden seed. If you are just trying to grow a large pumpkin to display, the [Dills Atlantic Giant](#) or [Big Max](#) varieties are excellent choices. Generally pumpkins take about 120 days to mature.

Step Three: Start Your Seeds Early

Start your pumpkin indoors and follow the seed sowing instructions. To allow the maximum amount of growing time you want to get your starts outside as soon as possible, without exposing them to freezing temperatures. Usually this means germinating and planting your seeds 2-3 weeks before your last spring frost date.

- **Germinating Giant Pumpkin Seeds** - If you have paid the premium price for some quality seeds you sure don't want to waste them. To aid in their germination you can utilize the scarification technique

of filing the seeds edges to increase water absorption and speed germination times. Gently file the edges except for the pointed tip where the roots will grow from. File just until you can see a change in color as the outer seed coat is removed. Then soak the seeds in warm water for 3-6 hours. You can soak for as little as two hours and up to 24 hours depending on your preferences and how hard the seed coat is. If you are following the above recommended scarification practice though we recommend sticking to a shorter soak time. Then, wrap your seeds in a damp paper towel until they have sprouted.

Once your seeds have germinated it is time to plant them in a pot. Sow your seed ½ inch deep in a pot up to 12 inches. Keep the soil moist, not wet. You will see the best germination and growth around 85 to 90°F by using bottom heat. When the sprout emerges place under a light (only inches away from the plant) or near a window with full sun. For a more specific timeline and growing tips contact your local [Pumpkin Growers Association](#).

Step Four: Plant Outside ASAP

You can transplant your pumpkin start as soon as you have passed your last spring frost date. Find your frost date from a trusted database to plan your garden. Pumpkins do not like being in a pot for long as their root systems can grow quickly. When planting add organic matter, such as compost, to the soil for good drainage and a source of nutrients.

Pumpkins need a lot of water to thrive. Water daily, or as little as every 2-5 days depending on soil moisture levels and local soil conditions. It is best to water at ground level, avoiding wet leaves to prevent disease. When dealing with cool temperatures it is best to cover with a row cover or plastic sheet to maintain stable temperatures. Pumpkins like warm weather for better plant development. If temperatures within your cover begin to approach 85°F, ventilate to prevent stunted growth.

Step Five: Giant Pumpkin Pollination

While pumpkins are traditionally pollinated by bees, a more precise method is used to grow extremely large pumpkins. To guarantee desired development, select a female and male flower to manually pollinate. The

male flowers will be more plentiful with long stems. The female blooms, while fewer than the male, will have an obvious difference. At the base of the flower there will be a swollen ovary. To allow enough nutrients to be directed to your developing pumpkin select a bloom on the main stem with several secondary vines growing behind the bloom. You will want to remove secondary vines developing on the main vine, after the fruit as it grows. Paint the pollen on the anthers from your selected male flower onto the center of the female flower. To prevent the possibility of cross pollination you can use a cover or zip tie to keep the blooms closed before and after pollination. Pollination should take place around the end of June/Start of July.

Step Six: Control the Vines

Only allow a single pumpkin to grow per vine so that all the nutrients and growth hormones are focused on its development. If you are worried something may happen to this fruit you can allow a second fruit to grow for a short time in case something happens to the first. Cut off any extra flowers or pumpkins on the vine. Managing new vine growth is the most important ongoing task in growing a sizeable pumpkin. Allowing multiple flowers and fruit to develop causes the nutrients and hormones to be split, resulting in more pumpkins of smaller size. To push the optimum amount of nutrients into developing one giant fruit, prune your vines as they grows

- **Pruning Pumpkin Vines -** Once secondary vines, before the developing fruit, reach 15 feet long cut their tips. Remove all secondary vines after the fruit/selected bloom. To encourage better water uptake it is best to bury the vines allowing them to push more root development between the plants base and the pumpkin. Do not bury the leaves. The closer you get to the fruit allow the vine to remain loose. As the pumpkin grows it will need more flexibility allowed in the vine to prevent breakage. Many grower recomend directing the vine to grow in an L or U shape to deliver nutrients, but reduce the opportunity for the vine to break. To help direct the vines growth you can dig a small trench or furrow, also making it easier to cover the vine with soil.

Step Seven: Fertilize Regularly

Because these large pumpkins are heavy feeders it is important to fertilize every 5-10 days after pollination has occurred. According to Ohio State University, "Giant pumpkin vines require approximately 2 pounds nitrogen (N), 3 pounds phosphorous (P₂O₂) and 6 pounds potash (K₂O) per 1,000 square feet of growing space." To know how much of this should be applied as a fertilizer we recommend testing your soil. Application rates and fertilizer types are often perfected through personal experience and preferences. Applying too much of any nutrient at one time can cause adverse affects on growth. This is why we recommend soil testing for a more complete picture of your soil profile.

Step Eight: Think Ahead, How Will You Move it?

Once these fruits develop over 25 lbs it can be incredibly difficult to move these giants. To make it easier on yourself, we recommend creating a plan for how you will move it when you are ready to harvest. Just as a grower will likely have personal preferences for how to prune, fertilize, and protect their developing giant pumpkin, they will likely have a preference on what is best for moving it. One option is to place a wooden pallet under the pumpkin when the pumpkin is 25 lbs or less. Once established, if given adequate water, sunlight, and nutrients, giant pumpkins grow quickly. They sometimes put on as much as 50 lbs per day! Of course that depends on the growing conditions, genetics, and location.

Step Nine: Protect and Harvest

Until you are ready to harvest your pumpkin, keep a watchful eye. If you live in an area with intense sunlight, you may want to shade your pumpkin. This can prevent sun scalded skin and overheating. These conditions can lead to premature ripening and reduced growth. We wish you the best in your pumpkin growing efforts, displays, and competitions.

Squash Bugs...The Pumpkin's Worst Enemy!

Squash bugs are very difficult to manage once their numbers get out of control and can cause a lot of havoc.

They are most commonly found on squash plants (hence the name) such as zucchini, winter squash, and pumpkins, but they may also affect other crops in the cucurbit family (like cucumbers, cantaloupe, and watermelon). Other pests that are commonly found on squash include squash vine borers and aphids.

Generally, they attack young tender plants and seedlings, causing them to wilt and die. However, they cause little damage to plants in late summer and fall.

How to Identify Squash Bugs

The adult squash bug is a flat-backed insect that's fairly large (over 1/2-inch long). They are usually dark gray to dark brown.

The edges and undersides of the abdomen have orange stripes. They are able to fly, but they often simply walk around on plants.

Young squash bugs, or nymphs, may be gray or light brown and have black legs. They move quickly and often congregate in groups on the undersides of leaves.

Squash bugs overwinter in dead leaves, vines, under boards, and even in buildings.

In early June, they mate, laying small clusters of eggs (about 20) on the undersides of the leaves, and the females will continue to lay eggs through mid-summer. You'll find adults beneath damaged leaves and near the plant crown, where they use their piercing mouthparts to suck out nutrients from the plant.

Squash Bug Damage

These bugs inject a toxin into the plant and suck the sap right out of it with their sharp, sucking mouthparts. This causes yellow spots that eventually turn brown. The leaves will wilt because the damage prevents the flow of nutrients to the leaves, and then they will dry up and turn black, crisp, and brittle. The leaves also sometimes have ragged holes. Smaller plants will die, and squash bug feeding can decimate young fruit.

The wilting can resemble bacterial wilt, which is a disease spread by cucumber beetles (yet another squash pest), so be sure to find the bugs or eggs and identify them correctly.

How to Get Rid of Squash Bugs

- Early detection is critical! You want to catch squash bugs before they grow into adults, or they become very difficult to get rid of completely.**

- **Pick bugs off the plant early. Fill a bucket with water and liquid dish soap and flick bugs into soapy water. Once the bugs are dead, it's fine to dump the water anywhere.**
- **Pick egg masses off the plants in the morning and later in the day. You can also simply scrape the eggs off the leaves with a butter knife and let them fall onto the ground, where beetles will eat them. Eggs hatch in about ten days, so be sure to check for them on at least a weekly basis.**
- **Place a board or shingle in the garden at night (or pieces of newspaper). During the night, both adults and nymphs will congregate underneath the board. Squash between two hard surfaces in the morning and dispose of them.**
- **Keep checking your plants at least daily. If there are no more than a few vines infected, keep collecting and destroying the bugs and crushing the egg clusters that you find on the undersides of leaves.**
- **Remove plant debris during the growing season to reduce sites where squash bugs can hide.**

Using pesticides

Insecticides are not effective in managing squash bugs once they are adults, so don't bother trying.

In the event that you catch the squash wilting very early in the season and you catch this when eggs are hatching, then insecticide application is probably needed to manage it. See your local garden center or cooperative extension service for controls that are locally approved. The best time to apply pesticides is early morning or late at night (during minimum bee activity). Be sure to spray underneath the leaves, where most squash bugs are found.

It is not necessary to treat squash bugs found in the garden during late summer or fall.

How to Prevent Squash Bugs

- **Prevention is key: In the fall, burn or compost old squash vines to rid your garden of any possible shelters for breeding and overwintering.**
- **Avoid thick layers of mulches like straw or hay that provide an environment that these bugs seem to love.**
- **Practice crop rotation.**
- **Consider keeping squash plants covered until blossoming begins. Remove the cover for pollination needs. There is typically only one generation of squash bugs per year, and you can avoid them by covering your plants for the first month of spring. You can also delay planting your squash until the early months of summer.**

- **Companion planting can be useful in repelling squash bugs. Try planting nasturtium and tansy around your plants that are commonly affected by squash bugs.**
- **Select varieties of squash that are resistant to the squash bug if you have a big problem. ‘Butternut,’ ‘Royal Acorn,’ and ‘Sweet Cheese’ varieties are all more resistant to squash bugs.**
- **Clean up cucurbits and other plant matter in the fall to reduce the number of overwintering sites.**