

# PUMPKINS

Wynlen House

Monograph 1



## Understanding pumpkins & squash

**Pumpkins are part of the genus *Curcubita*.** This includes cucumber, gourds, melons and squash. Members of this genus are fast-growing, vines (prostrate or climbing) with long-stalked palm like leaves and tendrils. Tendrils have a distinctive twining tendency, encircling any object it encounters. Their purpose is to help anchor the vine. Most species have unisexual flowers, that is, it produces both male and female flowers. Pumpkins are a sub species within the squash

family. **Technically all pumpkins are squashes** but not all squashes are pumpkins. Squashes and pumpkins are generally described as either winter or summer types. The summer types are fast maturing, (around 50 days) have soft rinds, are quite perishable and consumed when the fruit is young. They include zucchini also called courgette; patty pan squash, scaloppini, and many more. Winter squashes & pumpkins take longer to mature, (one

hundred days or more) have a long storage life, several months versus two weeks, are consumed when the fruits and seeds are fully mature, and have durable hard rinds. Winter pumpkin varieties include Australian Butter, Jarrahdale, Queensland Blue, Masque de Provence, heritage varieties of butternut such as Wrinkled Butternut and so on.

Whether you use the term pumpkin or squash to describe these vegetables

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

The *Curcubita* family  
Growing information  
Curing & storing  
Nutrition & recipes





## The Flowers or Blossoms

Pumpkins & squash produce both male and female flowers. The female flower can be identified by the swelling at the base of the flower that looks like a miniature version of the fruit. The flowers are short lived and can close by mid-morning. Pollination is essential for fruit development. Bees and other insects normally complete pollination but sometimes it may be necessary to provide assistance. To hand pollinate, pick male flowers, remove petals then dab pollen on the stigma of female flowers. High temperatures (over 30°) can affect fruit formation, hand pollination can help with this.

All blossoms are edible. They have a mild flavour of squash or pumpkin. Both male & female flowers are edible.

**Harvest flowers** early in the morning when fully open. Cut the stem about 5 to 10 cm below the base of the flower. Make sure you leave some females flowers to grow fruit. The flowers can be stuffed and fried or sliced for use in soups, omelets, salads, pasta and stir fry.

## Growing Information

depends on the country you are in. In Australia and New Zealand we predominantly use the term pumpkin and rarely use the term squash, while in America squash is the predominant term used, with pumpkin specifically referring to orange coloured species in this family.

**Both summer and winter squashes are grown in the same season.**

Summer squash receives its name due to the fruit being harvested and consumed in the summer while winter squash is harvested and consumed later in the season and if cured properly will store well into winter for winter eating.

**Pumpkins are frost tender and can not be planted out until after the last frost.** In a very cold climate region (such as the Capital and Alpine region of NSW & Vic), this is not until

November. In most temperate area this is usually earlier in spring.

**Soil temperature needs to be around 20° for pumpkin seeds to germinate and they also need between 70 to 120 frost free days to reach maturity,** depending on the variety. Pumpkin seeds can be sown directly in the ground in a small "hill" of compost. A "hill" or mound is about 1 or 2 buckets of compost tipped out with the top flattened down.



Sow 3 seeds in each "hill" every 1 to 2 meters, with the rows at least 1.5m apart. The larger the fruit at maturity the greater the space between planting "hills".





After germination thin to 1 or 2 plant per mound. Our preference is for 2 plants. Thin by cutting unwanted seedlings rather than uprooting them, which could disturb the remaining plants.

In cool climates it is better to start seedlings indoors in

pots or other seed boxes. This enables you to plant out well developed seedlings after the last frost. In climates with short summers this ensures you have the best chance of your fruits reaching maturity.

In temperate climates this is not necessary. Like all plants producing fruit they need regular watering during their growth life. Mulching helps maintain moisture.

Pumpkin vines like to spread so it is necessary to pinch out the growing tips to force fruit production instead of vine growth. Soil rich in humus is ideal, avoid a heavy clay soil as your pumpkin will have to work hard in that.



### Pumpkin varieties - plant spacing & harvest times:

**Buttercup** has a sweet nutty flavor and a relatively dry flesh. Plant 1 meter apart. Takes about 14 weeks (100 days) to maturity. Fruits are 1 to 1.5 kilo and produces about 8k per plant

**Potimarron** has a rich chestnut flavor. Plant 1 meter apart. Takes about 13 weeks (90 days) to maturity. Fruits are 1 to 2 kilo and produces about 7k per plant

**Butternut** has soft skin and yellow sweet flesh with a nutty flavor. Plant 1 meter apart. Takes about 17 weeks (120 days) to maturity. Fruits are 1 to 1.5 kilo and produces about 6k per plant.

**Jap or Kent** has bright yellow flesh with excellent flavor. Plant 1 meter apart. Takes about 14 weeks (100 days) to maturity. Fruits are 1.5 to 2 kilo and produces about 6k per plant.

**Jarrahdale** has a grey skin and deep orange dry flesh with a rich flavor. It is a vigorous vine. Plant 2m apart. Takes about 14 weeks (100 days) to maturity. Fruits are 3 to 5 kilo and produces 1 -2 fruits per vine.

**Australian butter** has a fine flavor with sweet flesh. Plant 2m apart. Takes about 17 weeks (120 days) to maturity. Fruits weigh up to 7 kilos and produces 2 to 3 fruits per vine



### **Zucchini, golden scaloppini, patty pan and other squashes**

Like pumpkins zucchini and other similar squashes can not be planted out until after the last frost and when the soil temp. is 20°. Plants tend to be more clumpy than pumpkins vines but can become straggly later in the season. Zucchini, patty pan, scaloppini, etc. are planted in the same manner as pumpkins. They require a rich, high in nitrogen soil. Good quality compost is ideal.

Once seeds have germinated remove weakest seed leaving 1 or 2 plants in the one mound. Zucchini plants are very prolific and 1 plant is usually sufficient for 2 to 4 people. Other squashes are not as prolific – 2 plants for 2 to 4 people.

## Growing Information continued...

We tend to pinch out runners between 1.5 & 2m in length depending on the space available. Pumpkins grown in good rich compost will just grow and require little care.

If the season is wet or very high humidity you may find that mildew is a problem. There are a number of organic fungicides that can be used to treat this problem if it is severe, however for the home garden, you can try a milk spray (1 part milk to 9 parts water). Make sure treatments are used early in the day so that they can dry out. Remove badly affected leaves and thin out foliage so that there is better air circulation. Poor pollination can also be a problem. **See Flowers or blossoms P2.**



You can tell when a pumpkin is ripe when you give it a knock on the side, and it sounds hollow. The skin should feel hard and the tendril closest to the fruit should be dead. The stem will be quite woody where the fruit is sitting. When removing the pumpkin from the vine, be sure to keep about 5cm of stalk on top. If you are unsure if the pumpkin sounds hollow tap an immature pumpkin for comparison. Pumpkins need to be harvested before the first frost. Ripe pumpkins will survive a frosting but this can shorten storage life. Not fully ripe pumpkins will continue to ripen after harvest if picked before frosted.

## Curing & Storing

Different types and varieties of pumpkin vary as to how long they keep for. This can be from 1 to 6 months. The smaller softer skin varieties such as Kent, Buttercup and Pottimorrion will keep for 1 to 3 months after curing, while the larger, thick skinned pumpkins (Australian Butter, Jarrahdale, Q. Blue) will store well for up to 6 months.

**Cure fruits** by leaving in the sun for 5 to 7 days or in a hot house for a similar time.

Temperature needs to be around 27–29° for proper curing along with good air circulation. In cool climates these temperatures can only be achieved in a hot house. After curing fruits **optimal storage** is achieved at temperatures between 10–15° with 50-70% relative humidity with good air circulation. Proper curing and storage of pumpkins can ensure that you have a supply of pumpkins through winter.



### Nutrition and recipes

Carbohydrates in the form of sugars and starch are the major constituents of pumpkin flesh. One cup of cooked pumpkin meets the daily requirements for Vitamin A; 20% of daily Vitamin C; 10% of Vitamin E and contains small amounts of many other nutrients. It is high in fiber and low in fat. Not only is it good for you but it tastes great.

There are many wonderful pumpkin recipes. This is an oldie but a goodie. **Fettuccine with creamy pumpkin sauce:**

#### Ingredients

2tsp olive oil & 1 tbs butter

1 onion chopped

1 clove garlic, crushed

500g pumpkin chopped

½ cup (125 ml) chicken stock

¼ tsp grated nutmeg

½ cup (40g) grated parmesan

fresh basil for garnish

500g fettuccini pasta

Method Heat oil & butter in pan, add onion & garlic; cook until onion is soft. Add pumpkin & stock, simmer covered until pumpkin is tender. Allow to cool slightly.

Blend pumpkin mixture with cream, nutmeg, and cheese until smooth.

cook pasta until just tender. Drain.

Combine pasta with sauce in bowl.

Serve with extra parmesan cheese if desired and garnish with basil.

This recipe can be made a day ahead.