

PUMPKIN



- While typically planted in early July for an October harvest, pumpkins can also be grown during the late spring and early summer months when insect pest pressures are low and Yuma temperatures are better suited for their growth and development. Under the right conditions, disease-free pumpkins should have a storage life of 2 to 3 months or more. Even if it is difficult to provide the ideal conditions, storage includes a dry location at temperatures around 60 F, good air circulation and with fruit not directly touching the floor.
- As with melons and other cucurbits, the buildup of whitefly populations in the Yuma area during the summer months can increase the occurrence of diseases, hindering a fall harvest.
- Pumpkins and squash require bee activity for good fruit set. Fruit set in winter squash and pumpkins takes place largely in a 2- to 3-week period. Poor pollination results in poorly shaped fruit as well as excessive blossom drop. Pollen of the pumpkin flower (male) is not carried by the wind; bees are normally needed for pollen transfer from male to female flowers.
- Pumpkins were originally grown for their seed, not their flesh. Roasted seed can be salted for a nutritious snack. Some varieties have been developed for their naked seed, a mutation that lacks the normal tough seed coat.
- Male pumpkin blossoms can be dipped in egg batter and fried and they can also be sautéed in butter. There are more male blossoms than female blossoms, and limited harvest of male blossoms does not affect overall yield of the fruit.
- Although the female flowers are receptive to pollen throughout the day, they generally close in the early afternoon. Whether they set fruit or not depends on whether they were properly pollinated and the condition of the plants. Fruit set also depends on the number of fruit already set on the plant. If there are several fruit already set on the plant, further fruit set may be delayed.
- Pumpkins are called monoecious because individual male and female flowers occur on the same plant. Bees are usually required for effective pollen transfer. Similar to other cucurbits, the appearance of male and female flowers is affected by the length of the day. First flowers of the season are usually males, followed later by females that produce the fruit. Pumpkins will cross with other plants of the same species, but will not cross with cucumbers, watermelons or cantaloupes.
- Not only is the pumpkin a fun icon of Halloween; it is the key ingredient of that tasty Thanksgiving tradition, the pumpkin pie. While most pumpkins are orange, they also come in dark green, light green, white, red, gray, blue, and orange-yellow. Incredibly high levels of lutein, alpha-carotene, and beta-carotene are responsible for the orange coloring and also for transforming Vitamin A in the body.

- Many people think the pumpkin is a vegetable but in actuality it is a squash fruit related to cucumbers, gherkins, and melons. In Ireland, the original Jack O' Lanterns was made of hollowed-out turnips, a plentiful fruit readily obtainable throughout the British Isles. However, upon reaching America, the settlers found an excess of already hollowed-out pumpkins, ready to use. During the Halloween season, about 99% of the pumpkins grown for domestic consumption are earmarked for the sole purpose of carving Jack O' Lanterns.
- Pumpkins grow in present-day continental Europe, India, New Zealand, Australia, and Alaska. Settlers to the New World sent pumpkin seeds back to their English relatives where the new seeds and fruit rapidly became popular. Besides making a yummy snack, pumpkin seeds are full of zinc, iron, potassium, magnesium, and essential fatty acids.
- The world record time of merely 37 seconds was needed by Jerry Ayers of Baltimore, Maryland to make the quickest recorded pumpkin carving.
- Pumpkin flowers are edible and at one time, pumpkins were used as a home remedy to heal snake bites and to remove freckles. Pumpkins can be grown in Alaska but not in Antarctica, the only continent hostile to pumpkin cultivation.
- Morton, Illinois is the self-declared pumpkin capital of the world. The Nestle pumpkin packing facility prepares 90% of all processed and canned pumpkin consumed in the United States.
- Talk about an all-purpose plant! Not only are the seeds and flowers delicious and healthy for consumption, in early Colonial days, pumpkins were not used to fill pies; rather, they were an important component used to bind together pie crusts.
- Total production of pumpkins by major pumpkin-producing states in 2009 was 1.1 billion pounds. Pumpkins are grown primarily for processing with a small percentage grown for ornamental sales through you-pick farms, farmers' market and retail sales.
- The largest pumpkin pie ever made was over five feet in diameter and weighed over 350 pounds. It used 80 pounds of cooked pumpkin, 36 pounds of sugar, 12 dozen eggs and took six hours to bake.
- Pumpkins were once recommended for removing freckles and curing snake bites. Pumpkins range in size from less than a pound to over 1,000 pounds. Any pumpkin over one thousand pounds can be considered a record setter. Currently a Rhode Island gardener holds the record for largest pumpkin grown. In 2007, his pumpkin weighed in at 1,689 pounds. The pumpkin was an Atlantic Giant variety.
- Pumpkins are 90 percent water.
- Eighty percent of the pumpkin supply in the United States is available in October. In colonial times, Native Americans roasted long strips of pumpkin in an open fire. Colonists sliced off pumpkin tops; removed seeds and filled the insides with milk, spices and honey. This was baked in hot ashes and is the origin of pumpkin pie.

- Pumpkins are fruits. A pumpkin is a type of squash and is a member of the gourd family (Cucurbitaceae), which also includes squash, cucumbers, gherkins, and melons.
- Pumpkins have been grown in North America for five thousand years. They are indigenous to the western hemisphere.
- In 1584, after French explorer Jacques Cartier explored the St. Lawrence region of North America, he reported finding “gros melons.” The name was translated into English as “pompions,” which has since evolved into the modern “pumpkin.”
- Native American Indians used pumpkin as a staple in their diets centuries before the pilgrims landed. They also dried strips of pumpkin and wove them into mats. Indians would roast long strips of pumpkin on the open fire and eat them. When the North American settlers arrived, they saw the pumpkins grown by the Indians and pumpkin soon became a staple in their diets as well.
- Pumpkin seeds can be easily washed and then dried in a dehydrator. They can be stored in cool, dry places for a couple of years.
- The Sajerska region in northeastern Slovenia and southern Austria has a long tradition of growing pumpkin as an oil seed crop. The seed oil is used for salad dressings but also has uses in pharmacology and alternative medicine. Oil content of pumpkin seed varies from 40% to 50% depending on genotype. The oil is dark green and contains free fatty acids. The Vitamin E content, especially gamma-tocopherol, is, apparently, very high.

Kurt Nolte is an area agriculture agent with the Yuma County Cooperative Extension. He can be reached at 928-726-3904.