



Pumpkin

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Name: Pumpkin *Cucurbita moschata Cucurbita maxima* (Cucurbitaceae).

Origin: Pumpkins originated in Central America. The name pumpkin originated from "pepon" – the Greek word for "large melon."

Distribution: Pumpkins are commonly grown in North America, Great Britain, Europe and Asia for human food and livestock feed.

Australian Distribution: Pumpkins are grown in all horticultural production areas including Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Tasmania.

Preferred Climate and Soil Types: Pumpkins require maximum temperatures greater than 22°C, to grow to maturity. In long term high temperatures poor fruit set will be prevalent. They prefer deep well drained loamy soils with an optimum pH of 6.0 to 6.5.

Description: Pumpkins can vary in colour from white to yellow to orange to green. Pumpkin varieties grown in the Northern Territory are generally butternuts and Japanese varieties, which have lobed leaves with whitish blotches and angular stems. Pumpkins have separate male and female flowers; male flowers appear first then a few days later the female flowers appear. Pollination occurs when flowers are open generally for a few hours in the morning and in the evening. It is essential to have bees available to pollinate your pumpkin flowers.

Varieties: The Butternut pumpkin has a smooth, beige, skin, with a nutty flavour. Fruit size varies from 0.5 to 2 kg. The most common variety grown in the Northern Territory is Butternut large. It has a blocky shape and is popular with the Australian consumer. The Japanese (jap) pumpkin has a mottled yellow and green skin and a sweeter taste than most pumpkin varieties. Ken's special hybrid is the main variety grown in the Northern Territory and is also the highest yielding of the Japanese pumpkin varieties. The average fruit weight is 3 to 4 kg. Ken's special hybrid is much more superior in that it is higher yielding and has earlier maturity time. Consult your seed supplier for current varieties of pumpkin.

Culture: The use of black plastic mulch will conserve moisture and help control weeds in the row. Spacing of the seeds in the row depends on the type of pumpkin. For pumpkins, hills of two plants should be spaced approximately 70 cm apart with rows on 1.8 to 3 m centres. It is best to use drip irrigation in conjunction with the plastic mulch. Using drip irrigation instead of overhead irrigation keeps the foliage dry and reduces disease problems. It is also possible with drip irrigation to inject the needed nutrients through the drip line and spoon-feed your plants.

Pests and Diseases: Important insect pests of pumpkin are cucumber moth, grasshoppers, wireworm, pumpkin beetle, 28 spotted ladybug, myrids and thrips. Important diseases are powdery mildew, pythium, black rot and gummy stem blights, wilt, etching and blossom end rot.

Fruiting Season: In the Northern Territory pumpkins are usually grown in the dry season from May to September.

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Harvesting: Pumpkins generally mature in 12 to 14 weeks after planting. An indication of maturity is when the stalk dries out (cracking and corking) where it is connected to the pumpkin. Crops of pumpkins may be harvested 2 to 3 times by selecting the most mature pumpkins in the crop. It is possible to produce 2 to 4 pumpkins per plant with expected yields ranging up to 40 tonnes per hectare. Butternut pumpkins set fruit several weeks before the Jap pumpkin therefore Butternuts are ready to harvest earlier.

Storage Conditions: Whole, unblemished pumpkins will keep for several months in a cool dry place. Once the pumpkin is cut open it should be wrapped, placed in the refrigerator and used within five days. If the pumpkin is cooked and frozen, it will keep for up to six months.

Culinary Use: Pumpkins are used to make soups, pies and breads. Pumpkin flowers are also edible and the seeds can be roasted as a snack. Pumpkins contain vitamin A and C, folacin, potassium and iron. They are sodium and fat free.

Refer to the Butternut Pumpkin Growing Note – VG1.