

## How Pumpkins Grow

Pumpkins belong to a family of plants called cucurbits. Other members of this family are squash, gourds, melons, and cucumbers. These grow in fields on long vines that cover the ground.

Pumpkins come in a variety of colors, from white to yellow to orange, and range in size from less than a pound to more than 1,000 pounds. They trace their origins to Central America. The name pumpkin comes from the Greek word *pepon*, meaning "large melon."

Pumpkin seeds are planted in May and June, depending on the temperature of the soil. The seeds, dependent upon warmth and moisture, generally germinate in 7 to 10 days.

As the leaves and vines develop above the ground, an extensive root network is developing in the top twelve inches of soil. These shallow roots are noticeable as offshoots of the vine along its entire length. These roots are used to gather most of the food, moisture, and air that the developing plant needs.

The pumpkin plant develops a strong tap root that grows as deep as 2 to 3 feet. Tendrils that form along the length of the vine help to support the plant.

Yellow blossoms begin to appear after several weeks of growth. The vine develops both male and female flowers. Female blossoms are easily distinguished from the male by the presence of a small, rounded shape at the base of the flower.

Bees spread pollen from the male to the female flowers. After pollination, the fruit at the base of the female blossom begins to develop into a full-sized pumpkin. At this stage of development, the pumpkin requires a steady supply of moisture and sunlight.

It takes approximately 90 to 120 days for the pumpkin to develop fully after the seed has been planted.