

# Grow your own pumpkins

## Tips from our Grounds and Plants team

### Sowing your seeds

Seeds can be sown in pots from April to June. Fill a 7.5cm (3in) pot with compost, place a seed in on its side 2.5cm (1in) deep and cover.

Label, water and place on a windowsill or in a propagator (is best as they need warmth to germinate the best) and do not allow the compost to dry out. When roots begin to show through the bottom of the pot transfer into a 12.5cm (5in) pot.

Once seedlings have established, plant outside spacing them 2-3m (6-10ft) apart once the risk of frost has passed.

Seeds can also be sown from late May to early summer directly into the ground.

Choose a sunny, sheltered spot and improve the soil before planting by digging in well-rotted manure or compost which will hold moisture, give nutrients and allow for drainage too. Sow two seeds on their side 2.5cm (1in) deep.

Once the seedlings have germinated, remove the weakest one.

### Looking after plants

Protect seedlings with mulch and feed with general fertiliser or seaweed extract fertiliser, watering regularly though the growing season being consistent and not over or under watering (as this may affect growth).

If you're growing larger varieties use wire as a guide to train shoots as they grow.

Remove some fruits before they develop, leaving two or three fruits on the plant and remove the end tips of the vines as this will put energy in to the fruits and less in to the vine. This will encourage the plant to put its energy into producing larger fruit.

As the fruits get bigger raise them up onto a piece of wood or brick to protect them from rotting and allow the vines connecting the fruits not to be tangled up (take care to ensure the roots are not disturbed at the same time). Remove any leaves shading the fruit as it needs maximum light to ripen. If there's a risk of an early frost protect the fruit with cardboard and straw.

### Harvesting and storage

Leave the fruit on the plant for as long as possible to mature and ripen. When the stem cracks and the skin is very tough, the fruit is ready to be picked. Cut fruit off with a long stalk before the first frost. Pumpkins can be stored between four to six months.

Expose the pumpkin to sunlight outside for ten days or keep indoors at 27-32°C (81-90°F) for four days to harden. Keep your pumpkin stored in a well-ventilated place at about 10°C degrees (50°F). Make sure the fruits are stored away from any potential sources of vermin.

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