COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
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COLLEGE OF TROPICAL AGRICULTURE AND HUMAN RESOURCES
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GROWING PUMPKIN FOR FUN AND ADVENTURE

Pumpkins really are orange spherical varieties of squash which include the Cucurbita pepo, i.e., "Connecticut Field" and "Small Sugar;" Cucurbita maxima, i.e., "Big Max," "Hubbard," and "Buttercup," and C. moschata, i.e., "Butternut" squash.

Cultivars for jack-o-lantern include "Jack O'Lantern" (or "Young's Beauty"), "Howden" (or "Howden's Field," "Connecticut Field"), "Big Moon," "Big Tom," "Big Max," and "Mammoth." The flesh is also suitable for pies.

Cultivars for pumpkin pie should have flesh that's sweet, dry, and smooth. Cultivars such as "Winter Luxury" ("Winter Queen") has thick, rich, sweet, golden-yellow flesh.

All purpose pumpkin cultivar both suited for pies and jack-o-lantern is "Small Sugar" ("New England Pie," "Sugar Pie," "Boston Pie," and "Triple Treat"). Fruits weigh 5 to 10 pounds. Other all purpose cultivars are "Blue Hubbard," "Warty Hubbard," "Butternut," "Golden Delicious," and "Banana Squash," all of these are squashes.

Suggestions to make a pie mixture are from "Small Sugar" and "Butternut" or "Hubbard Squash" to darken the flesh color and produce a delectable flavor.

In limited spaces, bush or semi-bush pumpkins such as "Cinderella," "Cheyenne," "Spirit," "Jackpot," and "Funny Face" are confined to a 4-6 feet spread area. The flavor, productivity, and storage shelf life are not as good as vining cultivars.

The oriental or local types that are flat shaped with woody fruit stalks are popular in Hawaii. Unfortunately, there are no named cultivars and fruits rarely come true from seed. The New Zealand Types that have excellent qualities do relatively poorly in Hawaii.

Pumpkins require 90-125 days from planting to maturity. Pumpkins are grown for Halloween around mid to late July. The seeds should germinate within 7 to 10 days.

A planting hole 18 to 24 inches deep and wide should be dug and filled with aged manure or compost or both, with the top soil. About ½ cubic feet or about 5 gallons of organic matter should be incorporated. A fertilizer such as superphosphate should be thoroughly mixed in the amended soil. Form a mound at least 6 inches above the ground level, and place 3 to 5 seeds or seedlings 6 inches apart, later thinning to 1 or 2 plants 12 inches apart.

Pumpkin vine will grow rapidly (6 to 7 inches a day during the summer). Cultivate to remove weeds when the plants are young. Mulching lightly with cured manure or compost will permit further weeds.

Fertilize every 4-6 weeks with a fertilizer such as 10-20-20. Apply the use of over head sprinkling since it encourages the spread of foliar disease.

Flowers are pollinated by insects such as honey bees. Keep the fruits off the ground by placing a board or styrofoam tray under each pumpkin. Spread the vines to avoid overlap of the vines. Pinch off excess pumpkins and keep 1 to 2 per vine if growing pumpkins only for the size. Pinching the fuzzy growing tips on each vine provide energy into the developing fruit.

Protect pumpkin vines from excess wind since vines and tendrils will be damaged.

Insects that may become problems to pumpkins are whiteflies, aphids, leaf-miners and melon flies. Identify pest before spraying insecticides. Insecticides such as malathion and diazinon are cleared for pumpkins. (For further help with insect control, contact your local Cooperative Extension Service office.)

Melon flies present the greatest problem when growing pumpkins. The adult female oviposits eggs in the young fruit. The developing larvae feed on the surrounding plant tissue and destroy the fruit. Bagging the young fruits with a paper sack or newspaper soon after pollination may help control melon flies.

Powdery mildew is the most serious disease attacking pumpkins. A fungicide such as benomyl or sulfur can be used to control this fungal organism. Avoid watering leaves to minimize fungal diseases.

The longer the pumpkin stay on the vine, the better the quality. Don't harvest pumpkin according to catalog information about seed to harvest since climate and other factors may influence maturity. Pumpkin rind will begin to turn tannish-orange or will loose their sheen. Another sign of maturity include the stem will become woody. Harvest the pumpkin from the vine leaving the stem attached.

Pumpkins with the stems snapped off should be used first since they won't store well. Pumpkin should be cured for 7-14 days at 75-80° to harden the shell, thus slowing the loss of moisture during storage. Thereafter, pumpkins store best at 50-55°F with 50 to 75% humidity.

The flesh can be used for cooking, breads, soups, and for pie filling. The young shoot and flowers are also consumed. Seeds are used for snacks and are very nutritious. Best of all, the fruit is used to scare the lights out of ghosts and welcome little trick-or-treaters to your home during Halloween.

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"Use pesticide safely. Read and follow the label. Consult Cooperative Extension Service or Department of Agriculture personnel for authorized special local need registration or additional information. The user is responsible for proper use and application of pesticides as well as storage and disposal."

NOTE: The use of trade names is for the convenience of readers and does not constitute an endorsement of these products by the University of Hawaii, the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, the Hawaii Cooperative Extension Service and their employees.