



# Garden Talk

## Growing Really

## Big Pumpkins

"Where People who Love to Garden, Love to Shop"™



Most champion pumpkin growers have their methods and secrets for producing gigantic pumpkins and win contests. This advice is not meant to win games, but get you started on an exciting journey of growing a tremendous pumpkin that impresses the neighbors, friends and may even impress the gardener within. It all starts with the right kind of seed, one that is selectively bred to produce really big pumpkins.

Watters specially grown Atlantic Giants can easily reach the 100+ pound range, and several records top the 1000+ mark. Huge pumpkins this size is rare without extreme care from their gardener, but anyone can grow a huge pumpkin, and here's how.



**Placement** - We live in a part of the country where frost is likely in early May, start pumpkin seeds indoors about three weeks before the last frost. Sow one seed for every pot filled with 'Watters Potting Soil.' Keep the pots watered, never letting them dry out. Pumpkins are very talkative, and they wilt, droop and complain when dry.

Pumpkins like and need a lot of water, but don't plant pumpkins in a wet or dense soil. They need good, well-drained soil. Prepare the ground in early spring, as soon thawed and warm. Fertilize the patch with four inches of Barnyard Manure.

Blend this manure layer into your soil down one shovel's depth. At the same time mix into the ground Watters "All Purpose Plant Food" 7-4-4 for nutrition that lasts.

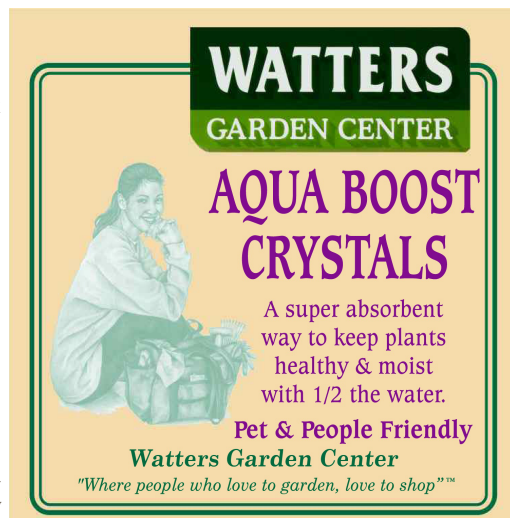
Aqua Boost Crystals level water use and take the pressure of thirsty plants. Blend 10 tablespoons in the soil that surrounds your new seedling. These water holding crystals hold moisture at the root level and promotes deeper roots under your plant.

Pumpkins need a lot of sun. Choose the sunniest place you have; remember that pumpkins are sensitive and will need shelter from wind, frost and possible hail. This ensures all their energy is sent to the fruits, rather than battling the elements.

**Planting** - When seedlings have the fourth or fifth leaf, set them outdoors in hills about the size of a pitcher's mound, one plant to a hill. Space each hill 10-15 feet apart. In raised bed gardens, place your seedling the edge of the bed so the vine can spill out in the direction or your choosing.

**Pollinate** - Pumpkins have two kinds of flowers, male and female, which appear in early July. The male flowers set first, followed by the females. A female flower has a baby pumpkin at the base of each bloom. Look for vines to be vigorous and well-established before letting a female set fruit. It might help to break off the first female on each vine and wait for the second or third when the vines are at least 10 feet long.

In a sense, you are choosing the vine before the pumpkin, and the strongest, longest vines produce the largest pumpkins. When you find a vine that's strong enough and a female flower on the verge of opening, put a bag of cheesecloth over it to keep the insects out. The morning she opens, pick a fresh male bloom, trim off the outer petals, and rub the pollen-laden stamen in the center of the newly opened female flower. This trick guarantees good pollination for a truly large pumpkin.







*Female Flowers have Baby Pumpkins at the Base*

**Growing** - Each plant will have 100+ leaves to each vine, and if you are trying to grow a 300-pound pumpkin, each leaf is responsible for up to four pounds of weight in your pumpkin. Every leaf, every stem, every part of the plants is now receiving sunlight, absorbing water, and blending nutrients to your prized pumpkin.

Giant pumpkins burst out from the vine, and if precautions are not taken, they tear away from their stem. Since vines put out roots at every leaf, tear out the roots of the vine where it is close to the pumpkin. This gives it room to grow without damage to the vine. Gently train vines away from the pumpkin to prevent crushing of the stem. Teach stem to grow in the direction of your choosing.

When two or three fruits on each plant reach the size of softballs, remove all but the most promising and start to prune your plants. Break off all other female flowers, so all nutrients and water go toward growing a huge pumpkin. After the first vines have reached 20 feet, pinch off the tips and the side shoots forcing all energy directly into your chosen pumpkin.



By mid-August, the plants are pulling in water and nutrients at a tremendous rate. Nighttime is when pumpkins do their growing, most expand two inches in circumference every night. Monsoon rains in July and August make a huge difference from year to year. If we have a dry season, give each plant 15-20 gallons of water twice a week. Water in the evening, and water only the base of the plant to keep the leaves dry, which reduces the risk of mildew and disease.

The end of September experiences the excitement of a truly large pumpkin. Pick as you want to show off in October, or enter into a county fair.

With these tips and tricks, you are assured at least a big pumpkin this summer, with potential for a really big pumpkin. Kids are impressed by even a small pumpkin coming off one of Watters Atlantic Giants plants.

### **Big Pumpkin Check List:**

- 1. Atlantic Giant Pumpkin Plant**
- 2. Barnyard Manure**
- 3. All Purpose Plant Food 7-4-4**
- 4. Aqua Boost Crystals**



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