

St George's Pumpkin Growing Competition



Who has the patience, love and care to grow a perfect pumpkin? This fun competition is an easy way to see what you can grow your own on a window sill and then in your garden.

Every child at St Georges will be given two seeds of many taken from the same pumpkin so everyone will have the same chance of growing a giant! They will also get a starter pot for the early weeks of growth. What kind of soil you use is up to you and is all part of the challenge of gardening!

Once the seed starts to grow use the St George's Primary School Facebook group to share photos of progress.

If you need any help please message Sarah Calvert on Facebook Messenger

How to grow your pumpkin

Step 1 - Sow pumpkin seeds on their side in small 7.5cm (3") pots of compost at a depth of about 2.5cm (1").

Step 2 - Seal the pot inside a plastic bag and place on a warm, sunny window sill until germination, which takes 5-7 days.

Step 3 - Once germinated, remove bag and grow pumpkin plant for about 4 weeks until it is large enough to be transplanted outdoors. This will be about 20cm tall. If both seeds have germinated, remove the weaker looking one.

Step 4 - Gradually acclimatise plant to outdoor conditions over 7-10 days (e.g. put outside for the day and bring back inside at night) before transplanting pumpkin into warm, well drained soil in full sun (can be a large pot!), with shelter from winds. Choose a spot that receives at least 6 hours of direct sun per day and prepare the soil in advance, adding plenty of well rotted manure or compost.

Step 5 - Plant pumpkin plant on top of a 15cm mound of soil to ensure good drainage and keep well-watered until established.

Step 6 - Pumpkins enjoy plenty of nitrogen so they will appreciate a feed of general fertilizer a few weeks after planting. They will begin to produce long stems which can be trained in a circle around the plant to prevent them spread too far. They have deep roots and are normally quite capable of finding their own water within the soil, but in very dry periods some supplementary watering may be required.

Pollinating Pumpkins

Pumpkins are normally insect pollinated but if the fruits are not setting then you may need to hand pollinate them. Female pumpkin flowers can be identified by a swollen bump at the base of the bloom, which male flowers don't have so you can easily tell them apart. Don't be alarmed if the first few flowers are all male. This is normal and you will start to find female flowers developing soon after.

As the flowers develop, pick a single male flower and remove its petals. Press it against the centre of each female flower. If you prefer, you can tickle the centre of each flower with a small paintbrush to transfer the pollen from the male flower. If you are growing pumpkins for size, select just two or three pumpkins per plant and remove all the others to focus the plant's energy on your chosen fruit.

Harvesting Pumpkins

Leave your pumpkins on the plant for as long as possible until the skin has hardened, and the fruits start to crack near to the stem. But be sure to harvest them before the first frost though! Cut each fruit from the stem leaving several inches of the stem. Harvest Week this year is 4-8th October. Judging instructions will be given nearer the time.

Pumpkin growing tips

Pumpkins can be prone to rotting if they are sitting on wet ground. If necessary, you can raise the fruits off the ground using a wooden board or a large upturned seed tray. When growing pumpkins, you can help the fruits to ripen by removing any foliage that is shading them. In cool seasons you may need to harvest pumpkins a few weeks before Halloween and bring them into a warm room to help them ripen in time.

Something fun to try

You can grow pumpkins in moulds to get them to take on different shapes – the mould just needs to be smaller than the final pumpkin size!

Prizes available for:

- Biggest
- Heaviest
- Most interesting shape

Ready, Set, GROW!!