

# What are Pumpkins?

Pumpkins are members of the gourd family, which includes cucumbers, honeydew melons, cantaloupe, watermelons, and zucchini. These plants are native to Central America and Mexico. Even though pumpkins originated in the western hemisphere, they are now grown on all continents except Antarctica. Pumpkins have been grown in North America for five thousand years.

Pumpkins are grown primarily for processing, with a small percentage grown for ornamental sales through U-Pick farms, farmers markets, and retail sales.

Most pumpkins are processed into canned pumpkin and canned pie mix. Processing pumpkins are similar in size and shape to a watermelon with a lighter colored shell than most ornamental pumpkins.

Pumpkins can range in size from less than one pound to more than 1,000 pounds. Miniature-sized pumpkins weigh less than one pound and are used for decorative purposes. Pie pumpkins come in many sizes, but the five- to 10-pound pie pumpkin varieties are most common. Pumpkins in the 10- to 25-pound range are primarily used for jack-o'-lanterns, but they can also be used for processing.

## How Do Pumpkins Grow?



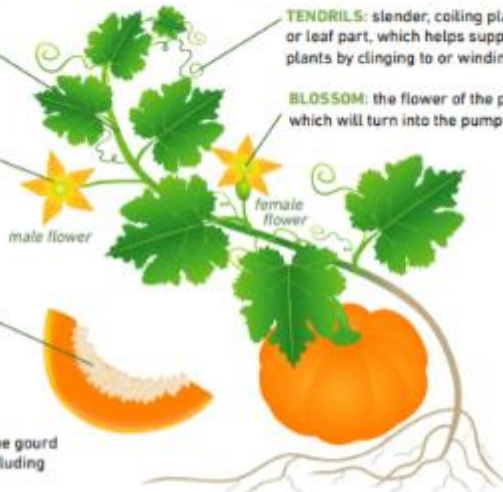
## Pumpkin Vocabulary

**VINE:** long flexible stems that trail or creep along the ground or climb by clinging to a support with tendrils.

**POLLINATION:** the transfer of pollen from the male anther to the female stigma.

**PEPITAS:** the edible seed of a pumpkin or squash, used in cooking and often dried or toasted to be eaten as a snack food.

**CUCURBITA:** a genus in the gourd family, Cucurbitaceae, including squash and pumpkins.



**TENDRILS:** slender, coiling plant parts, often a modified leaf or leaf part, which helps support the stem of some climbing plants by clinging to or winding around an object.

**BLOSSOM:** the flower of the plant, which will turn into the pumpkin.

**ANGIOSPERM:** a flowering plant with its seeds enclosed in an ovary.

**CARVE:** to cut, as in to carve a jack-o'-lantern.

**CROSS-POLLINATION:** the transfer of pollen from the flower of one plant to the flower of a plant with a different genetic makeup.

**VARIETY:** a kind or type.

**70%**  
of pumpkin-related sales occur in September, October, and November.



## The top five pumpkin-producing states

Illinois, California, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Texas harvest about 40% of U.S. pumpkin acres. Illinois harvests more than twice as many pumpkin acres as any of the other top states.



## Pumpkins & Pollination

### How do pumpkins grow?

Pumpkin plants have both male and female blossoms. Male flowers grow on top of a thin stem that shoots up several inches above the vine. The center stamen contains the pollen. There are usually several male flowers for every female flower. Male flowers usually bloom 1-2 weeks before female flowers.

Female flowers grow closer to the vine than male flowers. In the center of the female flower is a multi-segmented stigma. After pollination, a tiny baby pumpkin will begin to grow between the stem and the flower.



Male flower



Female flower with baby pumpkin.

## How are pumpkins pollinated?

Before a pumpkin can begin to grow inside the female flower, a grain of pollen from the male flower must land on the stigma at the top of the pistil. This is called pollination. Pollination can happen in different ways. Wind can blow pollen from flower to flower. Insects help pollinate pumpkins, too. As they search for food, pollen rubs onto their legs and bodies. As these insects visit other flowers, the pollen is rubbed off without them even knowing it.

One of the most important insects for pumpkin pollination is the squash bee. Unlike honeybees, which live aboveground in huge colonies, squash bees live solitary lives in underground nests. They are also faster fliers and hairier than honeybees. These traits make them much more effective pollinators for pumpkins. Pumpkin farmers do many things to help pollinators thrive on their farms.



Pumpkin pie filling is the best-selling pumpkin product on the market. Pumpkin spice lattes come in second, but can you guess what comes in at a close third? Pumpkin-flavored dog food!