



Growing Guru



Nancy M. Eyster-Smith
neystersmith@bentley.edu
Waltham Garden Club

PUMPKINS

Pumpkins typically make us think of Halloween decorations, Thanksgiving desserts, and spice jokes in fall. I do not normally grow pumpkins in my garden, because the vines take up so much space. However, a seedling came up in an area where I was trying to get cucumbers started in a cold frame. Pumpkins are classified in Family Cucurbitaceae and are relatives of other squashes, gourds, watermelons, cucumbers, and even luffa (yes, the source of the fibrous body scrubber). By the time I realized my seedling was a pumpkin plant from the seeds that I had put out for wildlife months earlier, and not a cucumber, I decided to let it grow. I put a wire cage around the vine to limit its spread and let the first 2 pumpkins ripen (left). The other fruits that were produced were picked green when the size of a softball, sautéed, and eaten like squash (tasted like cross between zucchini and yellow squash). The two pumpkins, harvested when orange and leaves beginning to die, were kept in my basement until October when I put them by my front door (middle). In November, I cut them in half (right) and scooped out the seeds (again put out for wildlife) and baked in the oven cut edge down. My favorite thing to make with the pulp is spice bread.



While you may think that only sugar pumpkin varieties are edible, I have consumed many non-carved jack o' lantern types by boiling chunks in water, scrapping the pulp into jars in two-cup portions, and freezing for later baking projects. There are over 100 varieties of pumpkins, and this [Master List of Pumpkin Varieties](#) has descriptions and photographs. Watch this [P. Allen Smith video](#) to see a great variety of pumpkins and their unique use in building a pumpkin house.

A few pumpkin varieties are giants and are only grown to compete for heaviest pumpkin. In 1979 the world record was 438 lbs. At the [Topsfield Fair, MA](#), a pumpkin over 1000 lbs was the winner in 2000 and a pumpkin exceeding a ton was the world's heaviest in 2012. A 2021 pumpkin became the world's largest ever at 2702.8 lbs. Here are the records for the [Top 10 Largest Pumpkins in The World with Country and State Records](#).

When your uneaten pumpkins are done being fall decorations, consider these [11 ways to repurpose pumpkins](#). Although I have composted pumpkins that begin to decay and have roasted pumpkin seeds or put them out for wildlife, it never occurred to me to make a pumpkin snowman or Rudolph. The painted ones shown are gorgeous too.