

## Giant Pumpkin Competition: Growing Advice

**1. Getting Started.** To grow huge pumpkins you need to start with the right seed. The seeds we are supplying are "Dills Atlantic Giant". In April or May sow the seed 2cm deep in small pots of compost. The pot should be watered, drained and a clear plastic bag or cling film placed over the pot to keep it warm. Pumpkins need quite a bit of heat to germinate, so the pot should be put in a warm place like the kitchen or airing cupboard. They should start to germinate in a few days, and should then be moved to a well lit warm position to grow on.



As soon as the first true pumpkin leaf is expanded (the first two leaves are seed leaves, the first true leaf follows these) the pumpkin should be potted on into a much larger pot, which needs to be kept indoors until the start of June. If you have any problems, or your seed does not germinate, contact us straight away for some help.

**2. The Perfect Home.** Although you will not be planting your pumpkin out until June, you should try and get the bed ready for it as soon as you can. Pumpkins love hours of glorious sun with their roots wriggling with delight in well drained soil, rich with the finest manure. They hate, damp boggy soil and long hours of shade, so it's important to find the perfect spot to grow your pumpkin. Once you've found the right spot, you need to prepare it. This involves digging over the bed and working plenty of well rotted manure or compost into the soil. Pumpkins take up a lot of room, and will need to be planted about 1.5 to 1.8 metres apart so make sure you have enough room. Remember to make sure you wash your hands after digging in the garden or using manure.

**3. Planting Out.** The pumpkin plants should be ready to transplant into the garden after the last frost (late May or early June), but they should be 'hardened-off' first. To do this the pots can be covered with cloches outside. The pumpkins should be planted about 1.5 to 1.8 metres apart and watered in gently.

**4. Watering & Feeding.** Pumpkins are also very thirsty plants and during their growing season, should be watered daily. They will need up to 11 litres of water a week.

**5. Pollination & Thinning.** Pumpkins have male and female flowers. With luck they will both be in flower at the same time and as the bees and other insects move from flower to flower they will pollinate your pumpkin. At this time you need to look at your plants regularly. To grow large pumpkins, you should only allow two or three pumpkins to develop on each plant. Remove surplus fruits while still small. This means the plant will put all its energy into growing just a few really large pumpkins.

**6. Harvesting (October).** Pumpkins are ready for harvesting when the stems start to dry and the skins harden. They should be carefully cut with a sharp knife (ask an adult to help you with this), leaving as long a stalk as possible.

For free seeds or further information go to [www.carrickfergusinbloom.org](http://www.carrickfergusinbloom.org)