



# GIANT PUMPKIN PROJECT

## 4-H Member's Guide

Adapted from Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service - Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources - Oklahoma State University

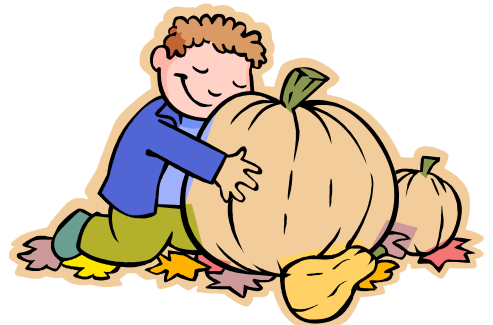
**Starting Plants Indoors** - If you want to get an early start, plants can be started in small containers and transplanted outside later. When starting plants indoors, plant two to four seeds per container. Be sure the soil is loose and will not pack. The container must have holes in it for drainage. The seeds should be started indoors two to three weeks before they are to be transplanted outdoors.

Place the plants in an area where they get some sunlight everyday. Electric plant lights also are good places to start young plants. The containers should be watered when seeded and whenever they become dry until they are transplanted.

**Moving the Plants Outside** – When the plants have four leaves, they may be transplanted into the garden plot or into a large container where they will grow. One pint of fertilizer (such as 10-20-10) per 100 square feet should be worked into the soil. The plot should be spaded six inches to eight inches deep. Compost or well-rotted manure can be worked into the soil to help hold moisture during drought periods. A Giant Pumpkin Project may be only one hill, but if space permits, three or four hills; five feet apart would be better.

**Transplanting** - Dig a hole in the soil to a depth equal to the size of the container. Remove the plants from the container being very careful not to disturb the roots. Place the plant in the hole. Set the pumpkin deep enough so the soil covers the material clinging to the root system. Gently press the soil down around the roots with your fingers. Watering will help firm the soil.

**Growing In A Container** - If you do not have a garden plot, you can grow pumpkins in a container and let the vines grow over the sides and into the yard. The container should be at least twelve inches high and have four square feet of surface area. A 50-gallon barrel cut off to 12 inches with drainage holes makes a good container. Fill the container with a good loose potting soil. Mixtures containing peat moss, perlite, or vermiculite usually work better than soil alone when growing in containers.



**Pruning** - After your plants flower and produce about 3 softball or larger sized pumpkins, begin to remove any new flowers that form. As the pumpkins grow, you should choose which pumpkin to keep and cut off the others. Usually when the pumpkin you are keeping is about the size of a basketball.

**Watering** - After the vines become large and the pumpkins have begun forming, they will benefit from extra water. Soaking the soil thoroughly about once per week may be needed (containers will need water more often). If, during the summer months, you are going to be away from home, arrange for someone to water your pumpkins.

If the pumpkin vines are not growing vigorously, consult your leader or 4-H educator regarding the need of additional fertilizer, watering, or pest control.

**Mulching** - Mulching helps the plants grow better. It reduces the soil temperature and the soil moisture loss from evaporation. It also shades out grass and weed seeds that try to invade. Once the soil is mulched, no further cultivation is required.

Suggested material for mulching may include: old hay or straw; dried grass clippings; cotton burrs; peanut hulls; sawdust; shredded paper; silage residue.

**Fertilization**- Pumpkins are heavy feeders and benefit from regular fertilization. Use your fertilizer of choice and apply weekly until harvest.

**Pest Control** - Cucumber beetles, aphids, and squash bugs are the three main insect pests of pumpkin plants. Often insects can be picked off by hand and destroyed. This reduces the need for chemicals. If an insecticide is needed, contact your local county Extension office for a safe and effective chemical to use. Use all pesticides carefully and always follow the manufacturers' instructions. Use the right amounts at the right time. Always wash your hands immediately following the use of any chemicals. Don't ever leave or store insecticides where children or pets could get into them. Ask your leader or extension 4-H educator to assist you, should insects become a problem.

**Harvesting** - The pumpkin should be fully mature before it is harvested. The stem should be cut from the vine and left attached to the pumpkins. If the stem is removed, pumpkins will decay much more rapidly. The contest weigh in will be held in late September and an email and postcard will be sent when the official date is set.