Life Cycle of a Pumpkin

by Ron Fridell and Patricia Walsh

Genre
Expository nonfiction tells facts about a topic. Look for facts about how a pumpkin grows.

How does a pumpkin go from seed to pie?
What is a pumpkin?

A pumpkin is a fruit. It grows on a vine like other kinds of squash. Pumpkins can be bumpy or smooth, large or small, long or round. They can be orange, white, yellow, or red.

Each year there is a new crop of pumpkins. Their hard shells have deep lines that go from top to bottom.

Seed

Pumpkins begin as seeds. The seeds are white and have an oval shape. A tiny plant is curled up inside each seed.

The seed is planted in warm, moist soil. In about ten days, a root grows down into the soil. The root takes in water and food for the plant. Tiny leaves push up into the sunlight.
The first two leaves pop through the soil. These are smooth seed leaves. They use sunlight and air to make food for the new plant.

Then the true leaves appear. They are jagged and prickly. The job of the seed leaves is done. They wither and fall off.

The pumpkin plant grows more leaves. The plant grows quickly and soon becomes a vine. The vine twists and creeps along the ground.

The vine sends out thin tendrils. They grab and curl around other vines. They twist around fences. The tendrils support the vine as it grows longer and longer.
The pumpkin vine blooms with many yellow flowers. Some of these are female flowers. Female flowers sit on small, fuzzy, green balls.

Other flowers are male flowers. They are on long stems and have yellow powder inside the flower. The yellow powder is pollen. It takes a male and a female flower to make a pumpkin.

It also takes bees to make pumpkins. They move the pollen from male flowers to female flowers. When a bee visits the male flowers, the pollen sticks to the bee’s body and legs.

The pollen rubs off the bee as it goes in and out of the flowers. When the pollen reaches a female flower, the fuzzy green ball at the end of the flower begins to grow into a pumpkin.
Growing and ripening

Late summer

All summer the vines, tendrils, and leaves of the plant grow and tangle together. Underneath the big leaves are little pumpkins.

The leaves are like big umbrellas. They keep the hot sun off the pumpkins. They also help to keep the soil around the pumpkins from drying out.

Problems for pumpkins

Growing pumpkins need just the right amount of water and sun. Too much rain rots the pumpkins. Too much sun withers the vines.

Cucumber beetles and squash bugs can hurt pumpkins too. Farmers spray the plant with insecticides or cover the vines with nets to protect the growing pumpkins.
The pumpkins grow bigger and bigger. Inside, the pumpkins form seeds and pulp. Outside, the pumpkins turn from green to orange.

Then the vines turn brown. Harvest time has come. The farmer cuts the thick pumpkin stem from the vine.

Four months ago there were only seeds. Now the farmer has harvested a wagon full of round, orange pumpkins. They will be sold at farmstands and stores.

People cook pumpkins and use the pulp to make pumpkin pie, cookies, soup, and bread. Some pumpkins are fed to farm animals.
Festivals

Some towns hold a pumpkin festival to celebrate the fall harvest. Sometimes there is a contest to find out who grew the biggest pumpkin.

Inside the pumpkin are many seeds. Some seeds are roasted to be eaten as a snack. Other seeds are saved to be planted in the spring. They will grow into next year’s pumpkins.

Next year’s crop

After the pumpkins are picked and sold, the farmer plows the field. Old vines and unpicked pumpkins get mixed with the soil. The field is ready for planting seeds again next spring.