

How to grow a **pumpkin** for the Berkshire Trebuchet Project

Plant in spring, grow all summer, and watch it fly at our fall 2027 Pumpkin Smash!

Thanks for growing a pumpkin with us! Pumpkins are easy and fun to grow, but they need **sun, water, and a lot of room**. This guide walks you through picking seeds, building a planter box, and caring for your plant until harvest. Keep a growth log. Scientists write things down!

Pick the right seeds

We want **small, sturdy pumpkins (about 2–8 lb)** that fit our trebuchets and ripen before frost.

BEST **Small Sugar** (also sold as "New England Pie" or "Sugar Pie"): 5–8 lb, ready in about 95–105 days

GREAT **Baby Bear**: 1½–2½ lb, about 105 days. Good for smaller spaces and our smaller trebuchets

SKIP **Giant or jack-o'-lantern types** (Atlantic Giant, Howden, Connecticut Field): too heavy for us, and they need even more space

Check the packet: choose **110 days or less**. "Bush" or "semi-bush" types take less room.

Pick the right spot

- **Full sun:** at least 6–8 hours of direct sun a day
- **Near a hose:** you'll water often in July and August
- **Room to roam:** open ground (lawn is fine) on at least one side, *see below!*
- **Not too close to your vegetable garden:** the vines will climb over anything in their path

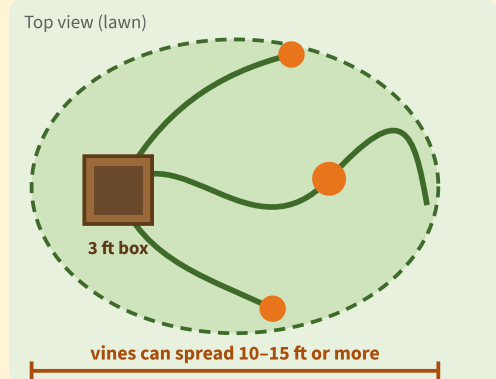
Keep a growth log

Each week, write down the vine length, the number of boy and girl flowers, the date of your first tiny pumpkin, your pumpkin's distance around (use a string), and the weather. Bring it to the weigh-in, where we'll use your pumpkin's weight to predict how far it will fly!

Heads up: pumpkins sprawl!

The planter box is just **where your pumpkin starts**. By midsummer the vines climb out and run **10–15 feet or more** across the ground. One vining plant can cover **50–100 square feet**.

- Put the box at the edge of an open, sunny area and let the vines run out onto the lawn.
- You won't be able to mow under the vines until fall. Mow short before they arrive.
- You can gently steer vine tips where you want them to go.
- Grow **one or two plants per box**. More plants means less fruit, not more.



17 Pumpkin timeline (Northern Berkshires)

APRIL–MAY

Build your box, choose a sunny spot, fill with soil

LATE MAY–MID JUNE

Plant seeds once frost is past and the soil feels warm

1–2 WEEKS LATER

Sprouts! Thin to the 1–2 strongest plants

JULY

Vines run; yellow flowers open; tiny pumpkins appear

AUGUST

Pumpkins grow fast and start turning orange

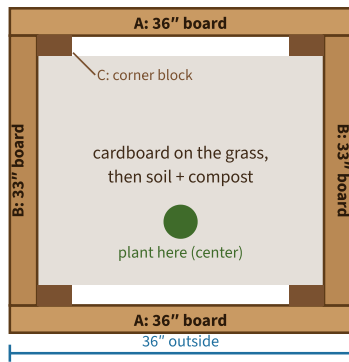
MID SEPT–EARLY OCT

Harvest before hard frost (usually early October)

Then: weigh-in in October, and launch day at our November 2027 Pumpkin Smash. Tip: plant by about June 10 so your pumpkin ripens before the first frost.

Build a planter box 3 × 3 ft, 9" tall · about 1 hour · a grown-up helps with saw and drill

Top view (not to scale)



Materials

QTY ITEM

1	2×10 board, 12 ft , untreated (hemlock, pine, or cedar, which lasts longest)
1	2×4, 3 ft or longer (a scrap is fine) for the corner blocks
24	3" exterior (deck) screws
—	Plain cardboard (peel off tape and labels)

Cut list

A	2 pieces of 2×10 at 36" (front and back)
B	2 pieces of 2×10 at 33" (sides fit between the A boards)
C	4 pieces of 2×4 at 9" (corner blocks)

Tip: many hardware stores will make these cuts for you. A 12-ft board is 144", and you need 138".

Assemble & set up

1. Stand a **C** block inside each end of a **B** board, flush with the top. Screw through the board into the block (3 screws each).
2. Butt the **A** boards against the ends and screw them into the same blocks (3 screws each).
3. **No need to dig up the grass.** Mow short, set the box in place, and cover the grass inside with **overlapping cardboard**. Soak it with the hose. The grass underneath dies and turns into food for the soil.
4. Fill the box with soil (right), mounding it a little higher in the middle, and water well.

No yard? A 25–30 gallon fabric grow bag on a sunny patch works for a Baby Bear, but the vines will still want to wander.

How much soil?

The box holds about **6–7 cubic feet**. Mix roughly **2 parts garden or raised-bed soil to 1 part compost**:

- **3 bags** (1.5 cu ft each) of raised-bed or garden soil
- **+ 2 bags** (1 cu ft each) of compost or composted manure
- or about **¼ cubic yard** of bulk soil-and-compost mix

Pumpkins are **hungry**. Mix in a handful of balanced organic vegetable fertilizer at planting, and again when the vines start to run.

Plant & water

- Push **3 seeds, 1" deep**, into the center mound, pointy end down
- When they have 2–3 real leaves, keep the **1–2 strongest** (snip the others)
- Water deeply at the base, about **1" a week**, more in hot spells. Morning is best; keep the leaves dry

Flowers & bugs

- **Boy flowers** open first on thin stems. **Girl flowers** have a tiny pumpkin at the base. Bees carry pollen between them
- Few pumpkins? Be the bee: dab pollen from a boy flower onto a girl flower with a cotton swab, in the morning
- Check under leaves twice a week for **squash bugs** and their bronze eggs, and **striped beetles**, and pick them off

Harvest

- Slide cardboard or straw under each pumpkin so it doesn't rot
- It's ready when it's **deep orange**, the **skin is hard** (your fingernail won't dent it), and the stem is dry
- Cut it off with **3–4" of stem** before a hard frost. Don't carry it by the stem!
- Keep it **uncarved** in a cool, dry spot until the weigh-in and Pumpkin Smash