

The months of May & June were not what one would call ideal for growing giant pumpkins. Hopefully all our volunteer growers kept their seedlings warm and drier than the outside was and all our little power plantlets are ready for some warmth. Since we essentially lost a few weeks from where we would be normally, we need to focus on getting that plant growing and big enough to support growing a giant.

Nights are still pretty chilly so do what you can to keep the plant warm at night, giant pumpkin plants pretty much do not grow in temperatures under 50. Things you can do include things like a larger hoop house and/or some sort of heat. If your plant is outside with no protection, watering very early in the morning will temper the air temperature.

A bit more phosphorus in our fertilizer regimen (that's a higher middle number like a 15-30-15) will promote plant growth. Stick with the liquid fish and seaweed foliar feeding, spraying the top and bottom of each leaf until wet, 3 times a week. Mix your fish and seaweed in your sprayer at a rate of 2 oz/gallon of water and only foliar feed when the sun is not on your plant, very early in the morning or in the evening.

For those who have had their plants in a large hoop house, you should start seeing male flowers soon, followed by females shortly thereafter. Your main vine usually will be 8-10 feet long when this occurs. Vine training and vine burying is the most important thing you can do at this stage. Trench ahead of the vine about 2 inches deep so that the plant grows into the trench, making vine burying much easier. It's easy to get behind on your vine burying when the growth picks up and once you are behind, it's a lot of work to catch up. Sprinkle a dusting of garden tone in the trench as you bury vines to give those tap roots a good start.

If your plants are still small, hang in there, you can still grow a nice giant with a late pollination if summer is here to stay. If your plant is close to normal for this time of year, you should be focused on growing as much plant as possible because pollination time is right around the corner.

Water & mist your plant liberally this month, especially if temperatures rise above 80 degrees.

To test your soil for moisture, dig down 3" into the dirt and take a handful of dirt. Squeeze the soil and it should clump, but you should NOT be able to wring any water out of it. Keep it moist but NOT wet.

Pollinate your plant anytime from mid-July until August 1st by following these step-by-step instructions:

- Pumpkins produce both male and female flowers, males having longer stems and females having a shorter stem with a bulb or baby pumpkin under the blossom. The

ideal growing position for a pumpkin is at least 10 feet from the stump along the main vine on a small outward curve of your vine so the baby pumpkin will be on the outside of this curve. (GENTLY train the curve over the course of a few days so as to not snap the vine.)

- To increase your odds of a successful fruit set, you need to hand pollinate your female flowers.

- When the female is ready to open, the blossom will be about 3 inches long and get an orange hue. The same goes for the male flowers. This means the flower will open the next morning.

- First ensure you will have three male flowers available for the next morning. The evening before, take a gallon zip lock bag and carefully cover the female and the three males, sealing the bottom to the stem. Try to inflate the bag so the petals don't touch the plastic. Tie-wraps, placed gently around the top of each blossom, work well also.

- Early the next morning, between 6 and 8 a.m., the flowers will open. Have a piece of soft yarn about 8" long with you, you'll need it later. Cut the males off the plant first, keeping them covered and watching out for aggressive bees. One by one remove the bag or tie-wrap from the males and carefully peel away the petals to the stem, trying not to jar or shake the flower as you do. You will see the stamen left on the stem, covered in pollen. Don't touch them or rub them on anything. Go to your covered female after it opens and carefully remove the bag or tie-wrap. Using the three males as a paintbrush, one at a time, carefully 'paint' and roll the pollen from the males over the segments in the center of the female flower, making sure the pollen covers as much of the segments as you can.

- Next, gently pull the petals of the female back up together, closing it off like it was before it opened and tie it closed with the 8" piece of soft yarn. Remove the yarn the next day. Good luck !!