

# Harvesting and storing pumpkins

## Recognize the problem

Pumpkins are one of the most widely grown vegetable food crops. It is grown in many homesteads for food security and income generation. Like most food crops, pumpkins are planted at the beginning of the rainy season. This results in plenty of food stuff at the time of harvest followed by food waste and losses to storage pests and pathogens resulting in food scarcity at a certain time of the year. At the peak of the harvest time, pumpkins can be harvested and stored following appropriate practices for 3 to 5 months and be used as food during the period when there is scarcity of food. Unfortunately, most pumpkin producers and consumers do not know how this can be achieved appropriately.

Mature pumpkin with faded skin colour. (Photo by Naggayi Robinah, 2017)



## Background

The best time to harvest pumpkins are when they are mature for long storage. Maturity is determined by the colour of the pumpkin fruit and never by fruit size. Some cultivars remain small to harvest while others grow big when they are still young. It is very important to consider the different ways of determining maturity because if followed one cannot fail to identify a fully ripe pumpkin fruit. When harvesting, do not force or tear off the vine from the fruit and avoid bruising after harvesting as these result into wounding which creates avenues of entry for pathogens. Curing helps toughen the skin. All these procedures are aimed at prolonging the shelf life of the pumpkin fruit and in the long run ensuring food security.

Well-cut stalk of a pumpkin. (Photo by Bad mama Genny, 2011)



## Management

- A pumpkin ripens when its colour fades, it would look pale in comparison to its original colour when young.
- When you press the pumpkin with your thumb, the rind will feel hard.
- If beaten using the palm of your hand it will make a hollow sound.
- Press your nails into the pumpkin skin, it will resist the puncture.
- At harvesting, cut the fruit off the vine carefully by using a sharp knife.
- Cut the pumpkin off the vine with its stalk on, a distance of 3 to 4 inches in length for longevity at storage
- Handle carefully without bruising.
- Cure them in moderate sunshine for 2 days to toughen their skin and store in a cool place at a temp of 55F.

Scientific name(s) > *Cucurbita moschata*

The recommendations in this factsheet are relevant to: Uganda



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