

# The Great Pumpkin for North Dakota

Do you remember Linus from Peanuts in the pumpkin patch? Instead of trick-or-treating with his friends on Halloween, Linus spent the night waiting for the Great Pumpkin. Although the magical spirit never came, Linus' adventure is a reminder to all of us about the charm of pumpkins.

There is something special about pumpkins in autumn. It's fun to grow your own Halloween pumpkin—especially if you have children to enjoy them with.

Research trials conducted in over 100 gardens across North Dakota the past three years have identified a Great Pumpkin variety for us: 'Neon'. True to its name, 'Neon' is a beacon of glowing orange in the garden through the summer. Its pumpkins turn orange weeks before other varieties. This can be critical in a state like ours, which has a very short growing season. Our team of backyard researchers was amazed to see bright orange pumpkins in their gardens in August while pumpkins of other va-

rieties were just beginning to turn orange.

Growing pumpkins in a garden is fun, but you have to be careful. Pumpkin vines can grow and grow and grow—gobbling up nearby plants and taking over the entire garden. But the vines of 'Neon' only spread six to eight feet across. I grew a row of 'Neon' this year and every plant (spaced 18" apart) has at least one nice-shaped pumpkin. The fruits are bright orange and have a sturdy handle.

'Neon' pumpkins are a nice size for jack-o'-lanterns. They grow about 10 inches across and weigh 7–8 pounds. Granted, these pumpkins are not huge, but to grow a 100-pound pumpkin you need to manage the vines carefully, thin the fruits, and give them lots of water—a precious resource in our state.

'Neon' will delight you and your kids. If you are interested in trying 'Neon' and other special varieties, please send me an e-mail at <tom.kalb@ndsu.edu>. I'll be sending out the announcements next February and kids can participate for free. *DK*

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