



Pumpkins from Chile – Felipe



Description of area

Santiago, the capital of Chile, sits at the base of the Andes. It has a Mediterranean climate so summers are long, very dry and hot, winters cooler and wet. Frosts are unusual but not unknown. The growing season runs from December to mid-March.

Background to Felipe

Felipe moved to Santiago when he was eight, and returned to the UK as an adult. He now has a strong interest in growing Chilean and perennial vegetables.

"...there was a lot of warmth, both physically but just all the presence of loved ones, which was quite a contrast to having spent my very early childhood in the UK with a very, very small circle of friends and no extended family..."

Crops grown in the region

Beans used for eating fresh or dried: pumpkins, maize, chillies, onions and tomatoes. Fruit trees especially stone fruits such as apricots and peaches are popular and are often grown in public spaces. Other fruits include melons and grapevines.

"It was like a crimson maize, it got to an absolutely amazing height... but also it didn't ripen in time... because they like the very, very long summer."

Growing Chilean pumpkin

"It's pretty much like growing your normal pumpkin. What I found great about it... was the fact that the bugs don't seem to really burrow into the skin unlike other pumpkins because it's so, so thick".

"The typical Chilean pumpkin is absolutely massive... a giant pumpkin... So the skin is like a slightly emerald green and the inside is a very, very bright orange and it's really quite a nice creamy texture... it breaks down slightly but not so much"

Growing and using Pumpkins in the UK

Pumpkins can be grown in the UK but need starting off under cover. They can take up a lot of space when growing, so you may want to train them up a substantial archway or over a fence or shed. The type grown for Hallowe'en tend to be not very good eating – for best quality choose a variety such as Crown Prince, Hokkaido or Uchi Kuri if you can't get hold of the Chilean pumpkins. Pumpkins are one of the few vegetables that improve in flavour once they've been picked!

How to grow

Crop details: Half-hardy annual: seed. Time to harvest: 2–4 months after sowing.

Grow with cucurbits in rotation. Size: medium to large.

Growing timeline: Sow indoors April–May. Plant out May–June. Harvest September.



Sow

Sow two or three seeds per pot or large-celled module trays indoors in early April to May. Transplant to a sunny, sheltered site with good drainage and fertile soil as soon as frosts are over and soil is warm. Space plants 1m/3ft apart and allow at least 1.3m/4ft between rows.

Grow

Plants will benefit from application of well-rotted garden compost before the growing season starts, but then require little other care apart from keeping them free of weeds and watering in dry weather. Once pumpkins start to form, place a board underneath each fruit to stop it rotting in contact with the soil. A plant can only ripen about four fruits, so any surplus should be eaten very young. Alternatively eat the flowers and young shoots.

Harvest

Allow to ripen fully and pick before frosts. When a pumpkin is ripe, the skin should be hard and make a hollow sound if tapped. Turn fruit to expose to the air to all parts before picking once the stem becomes dry to touch. Leave a fairly short stem 'handle' on fruit and keep in a warm dry place for long storage, turning occasionally. Mature pumpkins will store until February or March at best.

Cook

Porotos Granados – Chilean bean and pumpkin stew. Use half-mature beans – like borlotti beans – freshly podded. Put beans in a large pan with onions, and cubes of pumpkin sweated in olive oil. Cover with chicken stock, then simmer down until beans are cooked and the pumpkin is softening and starting to thicken – this may take anything up to an hour, depending on the stage of the beans. Add sweetcorn kernels, cook another 5-10 minutes then season with fresh basil, salt and black pepper or chilli to taste.

