

Jefferson County Extension Service, 810 Barret Avenue, Louisville, KY 40204-1782
Phone: (502) 569-2344 Fax: (502) 569-3958 <http://ces.ca.uky.edu/Jefferson>

Harvesting and handling pumpkins

Source: Kenny Seebold, UK extension plant pathologist

For many people, pumpkins are a symbol of the fall season. Here in Kentucky, commercial farms are harvesting pumpkins, and they are readily available in local markets. For those Kentuckians that grow their own pumpkins, these are probably ready to harvest as well. Whether you grow or buy pumpkins for fall decorations, it is important to realize that careful harvesting and handling will help them last throughout the season.

Pumpkins should be harvested as soon as they are ripe and show a good orange color. Although ripe pumpkins can be left in the field for a period of time and tolerate light frost, heavy frost can cause damage. Do not try to harvest when the fruit and vines are wet since this can lead to the development of fruit rot. The best time to harvest is during sunny, dry weather. Cut vines with a pair of shears and leave four to five inches of stem, or handle, attached to the pumpkin to further reduce the chance for rot. Any pumpkins that display signs of rot should be left in the field since these will not store for very long.

Damaged pumpkins are much more likely to rot, so handle each fruit carefully to avoid bruising or puncturing the rind. Be sure to store pumpkins in a cool and dry location. To prolong the life of the fruit avoid exposure to direct sunlight as much as possible. Also, store pumpkins in a single layer to promote better air movement, which



creates a less than favorable environment for bacteria and fungi.

As a consumer, avoid buying pumpkins that show any signs of rot. Also, steer clear of fruit that do not have handles or have handles in poor condition or are rotting. Handle pumpkins with care on the way home and store them in a cool, dry place out of direct sunlight. Keep in mind that once a pumpkin is carved, its days are numbered. After cutting, exposed surfaces become colonized with fungi and bacteria. The warmer the weather after a pumpkin is carved, the quicker bacteria and fungi will break down the fruit.

For more information about harvesting and handling pumpkins, contact the Jefferson County Cooperative Extension Service.