



# Trumpet Vine

A Bi-monthly Publication for the Master Gardeners of Cuyahoga County

## Spooky Pumpkins for Halloween

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Two pumpkin diseases have been devastating pumpkins recently in Northeast Ohio. Phytophthora and Pythium have been quickly turning healthy-looking pumpkins into mush. These two diseases are caused by oospores, and they attack under wet conditions. Despite having a dry summer, there have been a few periods of wet weather that have allowed these pathogens to infect. These pathogens love water, and can spread easily in wet conditions by swimming through films of water. Oomycetes have spores called zoospores which allow them to swim



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through water. Phytophthora and Pythium cause pumpkins and other crops they infect to rot. Fruit rot typically begins as a water-soaked lesion, then expands and becomes covered with a white mold. It is a problem for growers, as they put healthy-looking pumpkins in bins to sell, and the next day they see a smelly liquid oozing from the bin from a rotting pumpkin. The “ooze” can infect other pumpkins as well. These oomycetes can be difficult to control, as wet conditions allow them to spread easily. The oomycetes can infect pumpkins that have been sitting on bare, wet soils for extended periods of time. Spores can live in the soil for several years, and will re-infect in favorable environmental conditions. Because these diseases are caused by oomycetes, most fungicides are not effective. Improving drainage, air circulation, and sanitizing tools can help to prevent this disease from infecting; however, once infected, most crops are lost. On the bright side, these infected pumpkins still make great Halloween decorations! What better way to decorate a haunted house than with rotting, zombie-esque pumpkins!

Photo: Eric Draper, ANR Educator

