

Decorative Pumpkin Seeds - Kilai Zera'im

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Question: I bought a seed packet that says "decorative pumpkin small fruit - Curcubita pepo small mixed". The picture on the packet shows pumpkins of various colors and sizes. Am I allowed to plant them in my garden, with a 50cm distance one from another?

Answer: Following a conversation with the distributor, these seeds are imported from abroad and the pumpkins are not meant for consumption.

There are several issues that should be considered when determining whether there is a problem of kilai zera'im:

(1) Does the fact that the vegetables are very different from one another (in size, shape, color, leaf shape, and perhaps taste) mean that these are different species and so they must be distanced from one another?

(2) Are these vegetables only decorative, or are they worthy of human consumption?

(3) Are pumpkins considered an invasive species that spreads out, and if so, what is the distance necessary between pumpkins and other species?

From the picture on the packet, the pumpkins look very different from one another externally. Halacha defines species in the context of kilai zera'im as relying on three main factors: (1) leaf shape, (2) fruit shape, and (3) taste. Research is in order to see what these above factors are for each of the pumpkin seeds in the packet, so the appropriate halacha can be determined.

The fact that they are all pumpkins does not help since, for example, pumpkins and zucchini both belong to the Pepo species, but interplanting the two would nevertheless constitute kila'im.

In practice, unless a comprehensive research is done regarding the first two points, it is probably proper to take precautions to avoid kilai zera'im. Since pumpkins do spread out, each seed should be planted at a distance of 204 cm from one another.