

Food for Thought

October 2023

Picking the Perfect Pumpkin

We are in the full swing of fall and pumpkins are everywhere! They are a healthy addition to many recipes.

Pumpkin Varieties

Different varieties are grown for different uses. The size of the pumpkin isn't the only difference between a carving pumpkin and one that you use for making pies and other fall dishes.



Carving pumpkins typically contain too much moisture to be tasty when cooked, while cooking pumpkins are denser and have more flesh, so they are perfect for pies. Good varieties for cooking include Small Sugar, Baby Pam and the French heirloom.

Pumpkin Selection

Look for a pumpkin that sits flat, is free of bruises, is nice and round and has a deep, orange color. The stem, also known as the handle is important. It should be dark green, indicating the pumpkin is fresh and hasn't been stored for too long. You shouldn't pick a pumpkin up by the handle. This can damage it and shorten its life.

Pumpkin Benefits:

- 🍂 Great source of vitamin A (plays an important role in vision and skin health)
- 🍂 Rich in antioxidants (help give your body a strong defense against disease)
- 🍂 Fat free and cholesterol free (heart healthy)
- 🍂 Good source of vitamin C (aids in healthy immune system)
- 🍂 Fiber (heart healthy and intestinal benefits)

Pumpkin Puree

To make your own pumpkin puree, first choose a small, firm pumpkin for cooking which seems heavy for its size. You only need a 2 ½ to 3 pound pumpkin to have enough flesh for a couple of pies. Preheat oven to 325°. Cut pumpkin in half, stem to base. Remove all the seeds and pulp. Cover each half with foil and bake for 1 hr. Scrape meat from the halves and puree. Strain to remove stringy pieces.



Visit an area pumpkin patch.

Do a search online for pumpkin patches near me. This is a great way to spend time with your family while, getting outside, and moving your body while enjoying the season.

Pumpkin Pudding in a Bag

1 can (15 ounces) pumpkin puree ½ tsp cinnamon or pumpkin pie spice
1 ½ cups fat-free milk 1 package (1 ounce) instant sugar free vanilla pudding

1. Wash hands with soap and water.
2. Combine the pudding mix and seasoning in a one-gallon zip top bag.
3. Add the pumpkin and milk. Seal the bag.
4. Knead and mix the ingredients together by squeezing the bag with your hands – a great activity for kids.
5. When it's mixed and thickened, cut a small hole in one corner of the bag and squeeze the pudding into bowls. Enjoy as a snack or desert.

Pumpkin Seeds: 5 Flavors

Separate pulp from the seeds. Rinse the seeds well and place in a bowl. Sprinkle with your favorite seasonings and oil, (suggestions below) and mix well. Spread seeds evenly on a large baking tray. Bake at 350°F for 10 to 20 minutes or until lightly brown. Stir the seeds frequently to avoid burning. Cool pumpkin seeds, then store them in an air-tight container.



Try these flavor combinations:

- Cinnamon toast: 1 tsp cinnamon, 2 tbsp sugar, 2 tbsp olive oil.
- Chili: 1 tbsp chili powder, 1 tbsp tamari sauce, 2 tsp garlic powder, 1 tbsp olive oil.
- Spicy: ½ tsp paprika, ¼ tsp cayenne pepper, 1 tbsp red pepper flakes, 2 tbsp olive oil.
- Ginger Zest: 2 tbsp ground ginger, 2 tbsp sugar, ½ tsp orange zest, 2 tbsp olive oil.
- Parmesan: ¼ cup Parmesan cheese, 1 tsp ground black pepper, 2 tbsp olive oil.

Sources: Healthy Kids Challenge; www.eatright.org ; https://extension.usu.edu/news_sections/home_family_and_food/5-ways-to-use-pumpkin-seeds retrieved 09/28/23

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