

Appetite for Knowledge



COOKING A PUMPKIN IS EASY!

As the weather starts to cool down, it's time to break out the recipes that use fall flavors like apple cinnamon, maple pecan and, of course, pumpkin spice! While pumpkin spice is ubiquitous during this time of year, there is a myriad of ways to use pumpkin that are both sweet and savory.

If you want the true health benefits of this gorgeous squash, it's time to learn how to cook with real pumpkin — not just the puree that comes in a can. Not only is it incredibly flavorful, but pumpkin also packs an impressive nutritional punch.

Pumpkins are in season from September through November, which is why fall holidays highlight pumpkin recipes. First, it's essential to understand the difference between cooking pumpkins and jack-o'-lantern carving pumpkins.

PICKING

The pumpkin that you pick to decorate a porch and carve into is bigger than varieties used for cooking and contains more fiber than the type used in pumpkin stew or a pie. For cooking, select a pumpkin that is labeled "sugar" or "pie" pumpkin and weighs three to six pounds. Look for these

cooking varieties at the market: Cinderella, Long Island Cheese, New England Pie, and Sweetie Pie. Some types, like Winter Luxury, are appropriate for both eating and carving.



OCTOBER 9, 2019

When selecting the perfect pumpkin, choose one with no soft spots, no signs of mold, or unusual discoloration. It should also be uniform in color and have its stem intact. Opt for those that have a dark green stem, which indicates that they were recently picked. Unlike many types of produce that will go bad within a few days, a pumpkin will last for a few weeks until you're ready to cook with it. Just make sure to store it at room temperature. If you happen to have room in your fridge, it will keep in there for up to three months.

PREPPING

Thoroughly wash the outside of the pumpkin with warm water to remove any surface dirt. Then, place the pumpkin on a sturdy work surface, with a large cutting board. Use a serrated knife to cut into the pumpkin in half on one side of the stem.

Next, scoop out the fibers and seeds with clean hands. Use a large metal spoon to scrape the inside clean. Separate the seeds and save them for roasting later. Remove any stringy strands and discard them. Now, the pumpkin is ready to be used for pies and baked goods, or just roasting the pumpkin's flesh.

PURÉEING

To make pumpkin puree, roast the pumpkin halves for 30 minutes at 350°F. or microwave it in a microwave-safe bowl covered with plastic wrap and cook on high for 15 minutes until fork tender. Scoop the cooked flesh from the skin and transfer it to a food processor or blender to make a puree.

FRESH PUMPKIN PIE

Ingredients

- 1 medium pie pumpkin
- Pastry for single-crust pie (9 inches)
- 2 eggs
- 3/4 cup packed brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1 cup 2% milk
- Whipped cream, optional

Preparation

1. Cut pumpkin in half lengthwise; discard seeds. Place cut side down in a microwave-safe dish; add 1 in. of water. Cover and microwave on high for 15-18 minutes or until very tender.
2. Meanwhile, roll out pastry to fit a 9-in. pie plate. Transfer pastry to pie plate. Trim pastry to 1/2 in. beyond edge of plate; flute edges. Set aside.
3. Drain pumpkin. When cool enough to handle, scoop out pulp and mash. Set aside 1-3/4 cups (save remaining pumpkin for another use).
4. In large bowl, combine the mashed pumpkin, eggs, brown sugar, cinnamon, salt, ginger and cloves; beat until smooth. Gradually beat in milk. Pour into crust.
5. Bake at 425° for 15 minutes. Reduce heat to 350°; bake until a knife inserted in the center comes out clean, 40-50 minutes longer. Cover edges with foil during the last 30 minutes to prevent over-browning if necessary. Cool on a wire rack. If desired, pipe whipped cream around edge of pie using a star tip. Refrigerate leftovers.

CUBING

For cubed pumpkin, use a very sharp vegetable peeler or knife to remove the thick outer skin. To make it easier to peel the pumpkin, place in a microwave-safe bowl and microwave on high for 2-3 minutes until slightly soft. Stand the pumpkin hollowed-out side down on the cutting board. Cut the pumpkin into strips as wide as your recipe states. Cut the pumpkin strips into cubes, toss with olive oil, salt and pepper, and roast at 350°F., until tender, which will take about 20 minutes.

Winter squash is used as a substitute for cooking pumpkins. Butternut squash is a good alternative for pumpkin. Other choices are acorn, buttercup, calabaza or hubbard squash.

PRECAUTIONS

Fresh pumpkin purée will be much looser than concentrated canned pumpkin. Some of the liquid may need to be strained off or evaporated before it can be used for baking, where the balance between wet and dry ingredients is critical. If the puree still has too much water, line a strainer with several layers of cheesecloth, set over a bowl and add cooled purée. Cover with plastic wrap, refrigerate overnight and let the water drip out of the purée.

HEALTH BENEFITS

Pumpkin is rich in sight-saving vitamin A, with over 14,000 IU per cup. It's also low in calories, with only 100 per cup of puree. The same serving also boasts 6 grams of filling fiber.

Don't forget about the pumpkin seeds! The seeds of the pumpkin, also known as pepitas, are rich in magnesium, a mineral that's vital for bone building

and proper nerve and muscle function. A 1/4-cup serving of shelled pumpkin seeds contains 200 calories and provides 187 milligrams of magnesium and almost 3 grams of fiber. A 1/4-cup serving also has in 4.8 milligrams of iron, which is comparable to 6 cups of raw spinach. To maximize the amount of iron your body absorbs from the pumpkin seeds, pair them with vitamin C-rich foods, like oranges, strawberries, bell peppers, and cauliflower.

USING PUMPKIN

Pumpkin puree can be used in any recipe in which purchased pumpkin is used. If using a recipe that calls for canned pumpkin, figure one 29 oz. can is equal to about 3 and 1/4 cups fresh, cooked, and pureed pumpkin. A 16 oz. can of pumpkin is the equivalent of 1 and 3/4 cups of mashed pulp.

Here are some simple tips for including pumpkin in your diet:

- Make your own pumpkin puree instead of buying canned.
- Use pumpkin puree or canned pumpkin in place of oil or butter in any baking recipe.

Pumpkin season is here so carve out a place in your diet for nutritious pumpkins. Cook it and eat it. Pumpkin is suitable for endless culinary creations.

Sources

- Fine Cooking, finecooking.com
- Harvard Health, health.harvard.edu
- Tufts University Health & Nutrition Letter, nutritionletter.tufts.edu
- U.S. Department of Agriculture, USDA.gov



Vicki Hayman
University Extension Educator
Nutrition & Food Safety, NE Area
Newcastle, Wyoming
307-746-3531 • vhayman@uwyo.edu

Issued in furtherance of extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Kelly Crane, director, University of Wyoming Extension, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming 82071.

The University's policy has been, and will continue to be, one of nondiscrimination, offering equal opportunity to all employees and applicants for employment on the basis of their demonstrated ability and competence without regard to such matters as race, sex, gender, color, religion, national origin, disability, age, veteran status, sexual orientation, genetic information, political belief, or other status protected by state and federal statutes or University Regulations.

Reference to commercial products or trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by University of Wyoming is implied.