

Fruit Group – Pumpkin

Where originally came from:

Pumpkins are believed to have originated in North America. Seeds from related plants have been found in Mexico dating back to 7000 to 5500 B.C.

References to pumpkins date back many centuries. The name pumpkin originated from the Greek word for "large melon" which is "pepon." "Pepon" was changed by the French into "pompon." The English changed "pompon" to "Pumpion." American colonists changed "pumpion" into "pumpkin."

Native American Indians used pumpkin as a staple in their diets centuries before the pilgrims landed. They also dried strips of pumpkin and wove them into mats. Indians would also roast long strips of pumpkin on the open fire and eat them. When white settlers arrived, they saw the pumpkins grown by the Indians and pumpkin soon became a staple in their diets. As today, early settlers used them in a wide variety of recipes from desserts to stews and soups. The origin of pumpkin pie is thought to have occurred when the colonists sliced off the pumpkin top, removed the seeds, and then filled it with milk, spices and honey. The pumpkin was then baked in the hot ashes of a dying fire.

Pumpkin Facts

A pumpkin is really a squash?

It is! It's a member of the Cucurbita family which includes squash and cucumbers.

That pumpkins are grown all over the world?

Six of the seven continents can grow pumpkins including Alaska! Antarctica is the only continent that they won't grow in.

That the "pumpkin capital" of the world is Morton, Illinois?

This self proclaimed pumpkin capital is where you'll find the home of the Libby corporation's pumpkin industry.

That the Irish brought this tradition of pumpkin carving to America?

The tradition originally started with the carving of turnips. When the Irish immigrated to the U.S., they found pumpkins a plenty and they were much easier to carve for their ancient holiday.

Did you Know???

- Pumpkin seeds can be roasted as a snack.
- Pumpkins contain potassium and Vitamin A.
- Pumpkins are used for feed for animals.
- Pumpkin flowers are edible.
- Pumpkins are used to make soups, pies and breads.
- The largest pumpkin pie ever made was over five feet in diameter and weighed over 350 pounds. It used 80 pounds of cooked pumpkin, 36 pounds of sugar, 12 dozen eggs and took six hours to bake.
- Pumpkins are members of the vine crops family called cucurbits.
- Pumpkins originated in Central America.
- In early colonial times, pumpkins were used as an ingredient for the crust of pies, not the filling.
- Pumpkins were once recommended for removing freckles and curing snake bites.
- Pumpkins range in size from less than a pound to over 1,000 pounds.

- The largest pumpkin ever grown weighed 1,140 pounds.
- The name pumpkin originated from "pepon" – the Greek word for "large melon."
- The Connecticut field variety is the traditional American pumpkin.
- Pumpkins are 90 percent water.
- Pumpkins are fruit.
- Eighty percent of the pumpkin supply in the United States is available in October.
- In colonial times, Native Americans roasted long strips of pumpkin in an open fire.
- Colonists sliced off pumpkin tips; removed seeds and filled the insides with milk, spices and honey. This was baked in hot ashes and is the origin of pumpkin pie.
- Native Americans flattened strips of pumpkins, dried them and made mats.
- Native Americans called pumpkins "isqoutm squash."
- Native Americans used pumpkin seeds for food and medicine.

Pumpkin Nutrition

The bright orange color of pumpkin is a dead giveaway that pumpkin is loaded with an important antioxidant, beta-carotene. Beta-carotene is one of the plant carotenoids converted to vitamin A in the body. In the conversion to vitamin A, beta carotene performs many important functions in overall health.

Current research indicates that a diet rich in foods containing beta-carotene may reduce the risk of developing certain types of cancer and offers protection against heart disease. Beta-carotene offers protection against other diseases as well as some degenerative aspects of aging.

If you're counting calories, consider adding pumpkin to your dietary repertoire. With only 80 calories per cup pumpkin is a healthy way to add flavor and texture to a variety of foods. A couple of spoonfuls of purée makes a healthy addition to a fruit smoothie; or use it to add color, texture and mellow flavor to any of your favorite soup, stew or chili recipes. Remember to choose 100% pumpkin puree for savory dishes - pumpkin pie mix contains sugar and spices.

Unknown to Europeans before their arrival in the New World, where the squash was part of the Native American's dietary triad known as "the three sisters" (squash, corn, beans), the gourd is now popular in the Old World as well. The French use pumpkin purée in flan, and sauté fresh chopped pumpkin with tomatoes, herbs and goat's cheese. In Spain, fresh pumpkin is simmered with white beans, red bell pepper, chili powder, tomato paste, onion, garlic and sausage in a dish called guiso.

Selection and Uses

Selecting a Pumpkin

The most popular use of pumpkins is for decoration as jack-o-lanterns. When selecting a pumpkin for cooking, the best selection is a "pie pumpkin" or "sweet pumpkin." These are smaller than the large jack-o-lantern pumpkins and the flesh is sweeter and less watery. However, you can substitute the jack-o-lantern variety with fairly good results.

Look for a pumpkin with 1 to 2 inches of stem left. If the stem is cut down too low the pumpkin will decay quickly or may be decaying at the time of purchase. Avoid pumpkins with blemishes and soft spots. It should be heavy, shape is unimportant. A lopsided pumpkin is not necessarily a bad pumpkin. Figure one pound of raw, untrimmed pumpkin for each cup finished pumpkin puree.

Preparing the Pumpkin

Spread newspaper over your work surface. Start by removing the stem with a sharp knife. If you are planning to roast the pumpkin seeds, smash the pumpkin against a hard surface to break it open. If not, cut in half with a sharp knife. In any case, remove the stem and scoop out the seeds and scrape away all of the stringy mass. A messy job, but it will pay off.

Cooking the Pumpkin

Boiling/Steaming Method: Cut the pumpkin into rather large chunks. Rinse in cold water. Place pieces in a large pot with about a cup of water. The water does not need to cover the pumpkin pieces. Cover the pot and boil for 20 to 30 minutes or until tender, or steam for 10 to 12 minutes. Check for doneness by poking with a fork. Drain the cooked pumpkin in a colander. Reserve the liquid to use as a base for soup. Follow the steps outlined below in [Preparing the Puree](#).

Oven Method: Cut pumpkin in half, scraping away stringy mass and seeds. Rinse under cold water. Place pumpkin, cut side down on a large cookie sheet. Bake at 350°F for one hour or until fork tender. Then follow the procedure outlined below in [Preparing the Puree](#).

Microwave Method: Cut pumpkin in half, place cut side down on a microwave safe plate or tray. Microwave on high for 15 minutes, check for doneness. If necessary continue cooking at 1-2 minute intervals until fork tender. Continue as outlined below in [Preparing the Puree](#).

Preparing the Puree

When the pumpkin is cool enough to handle, remove the peel using a small sharp knife and your fingers. Put the peeled pumpkin in a food processor and puree or use a food mill, ricer, strainer or potato masher to form a puree.

Pumpkin puree freezes well. To freeze, measure cooled puree into one cup portions, place in ridged freezer containers, leaving 1/2-inch headspace or pack into zip closure bags. Label, date and freeze at 0°F for up to one year.

Use this puree in recipes or substitute in the same amount in any recipe calling for solid pack canned pumpkin.