



## Many uses for pumpkin

The most popular use of pumpkins this time of year is for jack-o-lanterns and fall decorations. But pumpkin is healthy and versatile, so we could be preparing and eating it in a variety of ways as well. Pumpkin provides fiber, vitamins A and C, potassium and protein.

Here are some guidelines when choosing a pumpkin for cooking:

- Choose a small pumpkin that weighs between two and six pounds.
- “Pie pumpkin” or “sweet pumpkin” is a good choice, but the jack-o-lantern variety also works just fine for eating.
- Look for a pumpkin that has one or two inches of stem left. Pumpkins with shorter stems decay more quickly.
- Choose a pumpkin that has a rich orange color with skin that cannot be easily broken or scratched by your fingernail.
- For every pound of whole pumpkin, you can expect to get one cup of pumpkin puree.

If you want your pumpkin to have multiple uses, you can first paint a funny face on it for a decoration using non-toxic paints. After the holiday, you can wash and cook it.

To use the pumpkin for maximum benefit, don't throw out the seeds — they can be roasted and eaten. Start by removing the stem with a sharp knife. Cut the pumpkin in half and scoop out the seeds and scrape the stringy part away. Wash the seeds in warm water and spread them out to dry. To roast, spray pan with oil and spread seeds thinly on the pan. You can sprinkle the seeds with salt or any seasoning that appeals to you (such as cheesy popcorn or Cajun seasoning). Bake in a 250 degree oven for 15-20 minutes.

There are three ways to prepare the pumpkin in order to make pumpkin puree.

- To bake: Cut the pumpkin in half, place the cut side down on a cookie sheet and bake at 350 degrees until fork tender or about an hour.
- To microwave: Place half of the pumpkin cut side down on a microwave safe plate and microwave on high for fifteen minutes or until fork tender.
- To boil: Cut the pumpkin into large chunks and rinse in cold water. Place the chunks in a large pot in about an inch of water. Cover the pot and boil for 20-30 minutes until tender.
- After following one of the three methods above to prepare it, you can now make the puree: Cool and peel the pumpkin and use a food processor, blender, ricer or potato masher to puree it.

Pumpkin puree can be used in any recipe in which you use purchased pumpkin. Pumpkin puree can be frozen at 0 degrees for up to one year.

If you have pumpkins but you're not quite ready to cook them, keep in mind that pumpkins can be stored for several months if kept at 50-55 degrees in a dry airy place.