



## Views from VanDeWalle

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*October 4, 2023*

### **Pumpkins**

I love this time of year for several reasons. First, it is harvest time; watching the combines in the fields brings back great memories of riding in the combine with my dad as a child. Secondly, I love the changing colors of the trees and a slight chill in the air. Finally, I love pumpkins and going to the pumpkin patch with my girls which is why this week I'm sharing some fun information about pumpkins.

October is National Pumpkin Month. Pumpkins are a member of the Cucurbitaceae family, which also includes squash, cantaloupe, cucumbers, watermelon, and gourds. Every part of the pumpkin was used by American Indians. Pumpkins and squashes were baked or roasted whole in a fire, cut up and boiled, added to soups and stews, or made into porridge and pudding. Strips of pumpkin were dried and woven into mats and the dried outer shells of pumpkins and squashes found new life as water vessels, bowls and storage containers.

Did you know that pumpkin is an excellent source of vitamin A and a good source of fiber? Also, a one-ounce portion of hulled pumpkin seeds is considered 20ounce equivalents in the Protein foods group. All parts of the pumpkin are used all over the world as ingredients in dishes – even the pumpkin leaves! Cooked pumpkin leaves and peeled shoots are a staple in many Asian and African countries and served with rice or porridge. The flavor is said to be a mixture of green beans, asparagus, broccoli, and spinach. Use tender, young pumpkin leaves for best results. Fresh pumpkins are best if you select small, heavy ones for cooking because they contain more edible flesh. Pumpkins for carving are not so great for cooking, but the edible seeds are great for roasting! My grandma always made the best pumpkin seeds!

If you have never made roasted pumpkin seeds, here are some tips from the National Center for Home Food Preservation:

- Drying seeds and roasting seeds are two different steps:
- To dry: carefully wash pumpkin seeds to remove the clinging fibrous pumpkin tissue. Pumpkin seeds can be dried in a dehydrator at 115 to 120°F for 1 to 2 hours, or in an oven on warm for 3 to 4 hours. Stir frequently to avoid scorching.
- To roast: toss dried pumpkin seeds with oil and your favorite seasonings such as salt, pepper, garlic, or cumin. Roast in a preheated oven at 250°F for 10 to 15 minutes. Once cooled, place the roasted pumpkin seeds in a sealed container and store at room temperature.

When selecting pumpkins for carving and fall decoration, choose varieties that suit your style! Traditional carving pumpkins are medium to large- in size, deep orange, and lightly ribbed with a strong handle. For painting, look for a small pumpkin with a strong handle and a smooth surface. Add additional interest to fall décor using miniature pumpkins with unique colors and patterns. Miniature pumpkins are typically less than 2 pounds and can be found in a variety of shapes and colors. Diversity among pumpkin varieties is incredible! With sizes ranging from 4 ounces to over 1,000 pounds, various unique shapes, and brilliant colors like orange, yellow, white, green, blue, gray, pink, and tan, there are endless opportunities to select the perfect pumpkin.

This information was taken from Nebraska Extension's [food.unl.edu](http://food.unl.edu) website which has more great pumpkin and fall recipes and nutrition information.