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Can I Have My Pumpkin And Eat It Too?

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A weekly question/answer column

Can I Have My Pumpkin And Eat It Too?

Jean Alder answers:*

There are more things you can do with a pumpkin than just carve it. Pumpkins are high in vitamin A and fiber, low in fat, and a good source of vitamin C, potassium and phosphorus. Jack-o-lantern pumpkins may be too stringy to eat and are often too large. For cooking, select sugar pumpkins, which are a smaller, sweeter variety with closed-grain flesh. Pumpkin can be prepared in a variety of ways: baked and eaten as a vegetable; baked into a pie, or made into soup. The seeds are a popular snack when dried and sometimes roasted and salted. Here are some things to try with your pumpkins:

- Basic preparation: Rinse off any dirt before using. For pumpkin puree to use in soup, bread or pie, you can steam, boil or bake. Peel pumpkin and cut into 1 ½ to 2 inch chunks. Steam for 15 to 20 minutes, or cook in boiling water for 8 to 12 minutes. Puree. Or if the pumpkins are small, split and clean out the seeds and pulp. Put flesh side down in a baking pan with a bit of water. Bake at 350 degrees for 1 ½ hours or until the flesh is tender.
- Microwave preparation: wash a 1 ½ to 3 pound sugar pumpkin; cut off the top, saving the lid, scrape out the seeds and pulp, and cover the opening with plastic wrap. Make a small hole in the plastic wrap. Microwave at high until fork tender, about 8 to 10 minutes per pound. Cut into wedges and serve with butter, salt and pepper. Or you can scoop out flesh, mash and add desired seasonings, or use in many other creative ways.
- For just plain pumpkin eating, wash a 1 ½ to 3 pound sugar pumpkin; cut off the top, and save the lid and stem for a handle. Scrape out the seeds and pulp, wipe out the inside, then brush with melted butter and/or sugar or salt, if desired. Replace the lid and bake in a 350 degree oven for 35 minutes. Coat the inside flesh once again with butter, sugar, or salt and bake another 10 to 15 minutes, or until it is fork tender. Slice into wedges and serve plain.
- Try making a stuffed pumpkin by cutting the top off and scooping the seeds out. Prepare a casserole of mostly precooked ingredients such as browned meat and cooked vegetables. With the ingredients still hot, place inside the pumpkin, set the pumpkin on a baking sheet and cook at 350 degrees for 1 to 3 hours, depending on the size of the pumpkin. A scooped out pumpkin also makes a nice serving bowl for salad or soup.
- Make pumpkin pancakes by adding fresh cooked pumpkin to your favorite pancake batter. Cook as directed and serve with warm applesauce.
- To dry pumpkin seeds, carefully wash the seeds to remove the clinging fibrous pumpkin tissue. The seeds can be dried in the sun, in a dehydrator at 115 to 120 degrees for 1 to 2 hours, or in an oven on warm for 3 or 4 hours. Stir them frequently to avoid scorching.

Store in airtight container.

- Roasted pumpkin seeds make a tasty snack. To roast, take dried pumpkin seeds, toss with oil (1 teaspoon per cup of seeds) and/or salt, and roast in a preheated oven at 250 degrees for 10 to 15 minutes.
- Another way is to wash and drain the seeds, then place on a cookie sheet and bake at 350 degrees for 15 minutes.
- For seasoned seeds, melt a tablespoon of butter and toss on clean seeds. Season with salt and pepper or other seasonings and bake at 425 degrees for 20 minutes. Roasted pumpkin seeds will stay fresh for up to 10 days.

* Jean Alder is Utah State University Extension Cache County Home Economist