

LIFETIME LEARNING PROUDLY PRESENTS – PUMPKINS, NOT JUST FOR HALLOWEEN ANYMORE

Pumpkins are not just for Halloween anymore. They are so much more. Few of our country's crops have such a long and storied history as the humble pumpkin! These orange gourds are part of our family traditions, our favorite meals, and the cultural fabric of our nation. Although we often think of pumpkins as vegetables, they're actually fruits! Pumpkins, along with cucumbers, tomatoes, and avocados, come from the flowers of their plants. That makes them all fruits. Pumpkins are also a type of winter squash. And yes, all squashes are technically fruits as well.

Each pumpkin contains about 500 seeds. Once they sprout, pumpkins take between 90 to 120 days to reach maturity. There are more than 45 different types of pumpkin, with fun names like Baby Bear, Spooktacular, Ghost Rider, Tricky Jack and Sweetie Pie. Every part of the pumpkin is edible, including the skin, leaves, flowers, and stem. Pumpkin and other squash blossoms can be eaten raw. They're also particularly tasty when lightly battered and fried.

Pumpkin pie is America's favorite Thanksgiving dessert, with 36 % of us preferring it to other traditional options like pecan, apple, or sweet potato. While those giant pumpkins are edible, they don't taste very good. Stick to small sugar pumpkins for pies and soups.

Pumpkin is a great source of beta carotene, (which gives it orange color just like carrots and sweet potatoes). Beta carotene turns into vitamin A after you eat it, which is great for your eye and skin health, and supports your immune system. Roasted pumpkin seeds are both tasty and nutritious. They are low in calories and high in protein and iron.

Here's an interesting tidbit. The first Jack-o-Lanterns weren't made from pumpkins at all. They were made from turnips! A folk tale said that "Stingy Jack" tried to trick the devil into paying for his bar tab. After Jack died, the devil wouldn't let Jack cross over to the afterlife. Instead, he had to wander the Earth at night, lit by a single coal. He put his coal in a hollowed out turnip, and earned the nickname "Jack of the Lantern". This Irish tale led to the tradition of carving turnips in Jack's likeness, to keep him at bay. When the Irish emigrants moved to America, they found pumpkins much more suitable for carving than turnips, and thus was born the modern Jack o' Lantern.

The following recipes cover various cooking methods and culinary delights. From simple salads to desserts, the pumpkin is a very tasty and versatile staple of our daily lives. I hope you get to try some of these recipes for you and your family.

Chef Cal

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