

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Here it is Thanksgiving, and there's a shortage of pumpkins! No, it's NOT, as the rumors have it, that it was all recalled. There is no recall, there just aren't enough pumpkins this year. The weather was so wet and rainy where the pumpkins are grown that they rotted on the vines or couldn't be picked on time. It just reminds us how much the weather affects more than our air conditioning bill, and reminds us again to be thankful for the great food supply system we do have.

So what are our alternatives if our holiday table depends on a sweet and spicy pumpkin pie? The first thing that might come to mind is to use sweet potatoes instead. After all, there are plenty of sweet potato pie recipes around. But if you're not a fan of sweet potatoes, or you all ready have them on the menu in another form, there are other options. Why not try another type of winter squash, or as a last resort, carrots?

Most other winter squash will provide an equally tasty pie, and if you don't tell the guests, most will never even guess there's anything different. If you can find Sweetie Pie or any of the other small, fleshy pie pumpkins they're ideal, developed just for baking. Butternut squash, those long, thick, pale orange ones with the smooth skin, are probably the easiest to use. Their even shape and smooth skin makes them easy to peel. They are very dense and you get more flesh and less seedy space in them. Calabaza are the really big ones that look like a dark pumpkin. They're used in many Latino soups and stews, and so large that often you will find them sold by the slice,

each wedge wrapped in plastic. But even acorn squash could be used in a pinch.

Take a look at your recipe, how much pumpkin do you need? If the recipe calls for a 15 or 16 oz can, (that's 2 cups) you'll need 2 to 3 pounds of fresh winter squash, any of the kinds mentioned above. For 2 cans of pumpkin you'll need about 5 pounds of squash.

Now you can chop, peel, boil, drain and mash it. Or you can cook it the easier way, which is to just cut it in half. You'll need a large knife and a little muscle, but just slice it through the stem, top to bottom. Use a big spoon to scrape out the seeds (save them to toast if you want). Put the halves, cut side down, in a baking pan and add enough water to make a thin layer in the pan.

Roast it until it's tender enough to stick a fork into easily. You can stick it in the oven beside whatever else you're baking, the temperature is not crucial. If you're doing just the squash, use a 375° F oven. The hotter the oven the less time it will take to soften, anywhere from 45 minutes to over an hour. When it's soft remove the pan from the oven and flip the halves over. Let it cool a little, then use a spoon to scoop the soft flesh away from the skin.

You can mash it with a potato masher, put it in a blender or food processor, or push it through a sieve to make it smooth. Measure out the amount your recipe calls for and make your pie. Taste the batter to see if you want a little more spice or sugar to balance the flavor. Most of the time you won't need to adjust it at all.

If you don't have pumpkin pie spice, make your own. For each teaspoon of pie spice, use 1/2 tsp ground cinnamon, 1/4 tsp each of ginger and allspice, and 1/8 tsp of ground nutmeg.

What if you end up with more mashed pumpkin than you need for the pies? Don't throw away all that vitamin A, fiber and minerals! Add it to soups or stews. It will thicken the soup and give it a wonderful creamy feel and pale yellow color. You can make pumpkin bread, muffins or cake. Or try these easy drop cookies tomorrow. They're soft and moist, just right for a light snack. Happy Thanksgiving!

Spiced Pumpkin Cookies

1 cup mashed pumpkin or winter squash	1/2 cup + 2 Tbsp margarine
1 cup sugar	1/4 cup packed brown sugar
2 eggs	1 tsp vanilla extract
1 tsp lemon extract	1 Tbsp baking powder
2 1/2 cups flour (1/2 whole wheat if desired)	1 tsp salt
1 Tbsp pumpkin pie spice	1 cup raisins

Preheat oven to 375° F. Cream margarine in large mixing bowl. Gradually add sugar and beat well. Add eggs one at a time while beating. Stir in pumpkin (squash), vanilla and lemon extract. In medium bowl combine flour, baking powder, salt and spice. Gradually stir into creamed mixture until smooth. Stir in raisins. Drop by spoonfuls onto greased cookie sheets, about 2 inches apart. Bake for 10-12 minutes, until lightly browned. If you make teaspoon-sized cookies, you'll get about 7 dozen, enough to give away as gifts!

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