

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Boo! Pumpkins are Good for You!

So, how many pumpkins has your child begged you to buy so far? Big, round, orange pumpkins are in every grocery store, in dozens of street corner stands supporting a local school, church or team, in hardware stores, big box stores and just about anywhere else you look! Most of them are intended for decorations, whether cut into jack-o-lanterns or not. Besides orange, there are ghostly white ones, weirdly blue ones, cute little mini-kins and everything in between. What will you do with yours?

Unfortunately here in our humid Southern climate, cut and carved jack-o-lanterns don't last very long. The bugs, 6-legged varieties as well as molds, get to them pretty quickly. So if you intend to use some for long term Fall decorations, they'll keep better if you paint on the scary faces rather than cutting them. Paint or permanent markers give you a lot more flexibility in your designing. And you don't have to worry about the little ones cutting themselves instead of the pumpkin. There are stencils and stickers to make decorating even easier.

If you do decide to carve a 'real jack-o-lantern', use a sharp knife and lots of care. Dull knives are more likely to slip and cut something else. Take off the top, the 'lid', first and scoop out the seeds. Kids will probably enjoy squeezing the slimy pulp to separate the seeds from the strings. You can toast the seeds (275°F for 4-5 minutes until golden) for a healthy snack for yourselves, or put them out for the birds or squirrels.

If you choose a white pumpkin for your 'lantern you might want to use some paint

after it's been cut and carved. The face or design you carve into it won't show up very well against the white skin. So, after the cutting is finished, leave the jack-o-lantern dry for a day. Then use black paint or a marker to coat the yellow edges. That will make the openings stand out more against the white skin.

Hopefully you'll also get at least one pumpkin for eating too. But don't disappoint yourself with a jack-o-lantern pumpkin. Bred to be big and firm, they are usually stringy and thin-walled, so they don't have a lot of pulp. If you want the full Pilgrim's experience of making your pumpkin pie from scratch, choose a pie pumpkin. These are smaller, with more flesh, less fiber and a sweeter taste. They're sometimes called sugar pie pumpkins or just sugar pumpkins.

To make a pie from one, cut it in half. Scoop out the seeds and put the halves, cut side down, in a baking or microwave dish. Add a little water to the dish. Then either bake at 350°F (about 1 hour) or microwave on high until you can stick a fork through the skin easily. Flip the pieces over and let cool until you can handle them. Then use a spoon to scrape out the soft flesh. You can boil the pieces too, but that can make the pulp more watery and runny. Mash, or put it in a food processor and puree until smooth. Now you're ready to follow your favorite recipe for a truly made-from-scratch pie.

There are dozens of other ways to use pie pumpkins, and just about any recipe for winter squash will work with pumpkins. Of course you can also make pumpkin pie with cooked winter squash as well. Butternut squash are particularly good, but acorn, turban and all the others will be similar. If they're kept cool they'll keep for weeks too.

Whichever variety you choose, you'll be getting plenty of vitamin A with all that gorgeous orange color, and a little folate too. There's a lot of potassium and some magnesium to help manage your blood pressure. Plus pumpkin is super low in sodium.

Here's a different way to use a fresh pumpkin, in a cheese and egg casserole. Add browned sausage with the cheese and egg mixture to make it a main dinner dish for the family. Enjoy!

Pumpkin and Cheese Casserole

1 small pie pumpkin, about 2 lbs	1 large onion, chopped
2 Tbsp oil	2 eggs
$\frac{3}{4}$ cup milk	$\frac{3}{4}$ cup ricotta cheese
$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp each salt and pepper	1 lb turkey Italian sausage optional

Preheat oven to 375°F. Spray large baking dish with non-stick spray. Cut pumpkin in half, scoop out seeds, and cut in $\frac{1}{2}$ inch wedges. Pare off skin and cut into pieces. Toss pieces with onion and oil, season with salt and pepper, spread in baking dish. Bake 30 minutes. If using sausage, remove from casings. Brown loose sausage. Drain off any grease. Remove dish from oven, sprinkle sausage over pumpkin. In mixing bowl whisk milk, eggs and cheese together. Pour over pumpkin and continue baking another 20 minutes until eggs are set and slightly browned. Serves 6.