

# Pumpkins Are Positively Perfect



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## Planting Personalized Pumpkins

To help children understand the life cycle of plants, take advantage of the pumpkin's long growing season.

### Beginning in May:

- Plant the pumpkin seeds in garden soil that has been well amended with compost or aged manure.
- Water and wait for the seeds to germinate.
- Cover the soil with mulch and weed your garden.
- Fertilize lightly every two weeks.



Soon the flowers will develop on the sprawling vine. Tiny pumpkins will appear at the base of those flowers. Once the pumpkin is the size of an apple, let the children use a felt-tip pen to write their initials or draw a shape on the pumpkin. Using a paring knife, an adult can trace over the marks using enough pressure to scrape the pumpkin skin. As the pumpkin grows, so will your child's initials or drawing! Removing other pumpkins from the vine will allow the personalized pumpkin to grow as large as possible. When the pumpkin is about the size of a grapefruit, slip it into one leg of a pair of pantyhose. Tie the pantyhose to a stake to support the pumpkin as it grows. Every day, photograph the garden and the pumpkins, and document the changes in a photograph album or on a graph. Harvest your pumpkin when the rind is hard and orange, between the first light frost and first hard frost. Cut the pumpkin off the vine leaving three to four inches of stem.

## Pumpkin Seeds Are A Great Snack

Pumpkin seeds taste great, plus they are high in fiber and good for you. You can add these yummy seeds to salads, or keep them handy for a healthy snack. Here are two great ways to cook pumpkin seeds:

### Roasting Seeds:

- Preheat the oven to 250°.
- Wash seeds well. Put seeds in a strainer, then rinse under running water.
- Be sure to remove all of the pumpkin strings.
- Once clean, blot the seeds dry.
- Toss the seeds in a bit of olive oil.
- Add seasonings and toss everything together.
- Spread seeds evenly on a baking sheet.
- Bake for 40-60 minutes or until crispy.

Cool and enjoy!

### Toasting Seeds:

- Boil the seeds for 5 minutes. Drain well.
- Sprinkle with salt and place in a thin layer on a cookie sheet.
- Bake at 250°.
- After 30 minutes, stir the seeds.
- Bake 30 minutes to 1 hour more until crunchy.

Cool and enjoy!

## A Visit to the Pumpkin Patch

Plan a trip to the pumpkin patch or Farmer's Market. Inspect lots of pumpkins before selecting the one that is perfect! Keep in mind that some pumpkins are better for carving, while others are better for cooking. Don't be surprised if you end up buying several pumpkins. Sometimes it is too hard to choose just one!



## Reading Corner

Read stories about fall, harvest, and pumpkins. A few books you might try are:

*Pumpkin, Pumpkin* by Jeanne Titherington

*Too Many Pumpkins* by Linda White.

*The Biggest Pumpkin Ever* by Stephen Kroll

*Seed, Sprout, Pumpkin, Pie* by Jill Esbaum

*The Pumpkin Book* by Gayle Gibbons

*Pumpkin Town* by Katie McKy

*Pumpkin Circle* by George Levenson

## Pumpkins Teach Us Science, Math, and So Much More!

The pumpkin is a great source for science, math, problem-solving, language, eye-hand coordination, and fine and gross motor activities.

### Measure and Compare

For school-age children, use a tape measure to find the circumference of the pumpkin. For preschoolers, use a length of yarn as your measuring device. Ask the children to measure different items and then compare their circumference to that of your pumpkin. Compare it to other fruits; compare pumpkins to pumpkins. Discuss the difference in size, shape, and color. Make a list of those that are bigger and/or smaller. Can you find an object that has the same circumference as your pumpkin?

### Inside a Pumpkin

Discuss what is inside a pumpkin. Make a list of all the ideas. When seeds are mentioned, ask for a prediction as to the number of seeds inside the pumpkin. Record these numbers. Cut into the pumpkin and let the children remove the pulp and the seeds. Separate the seeds and help the children group them into rows of 10. Count the number of rows of 10 seeds and use basic multiplication to determine the number of seeds in the pumpkin. Compare and discuss the actual results to the predictions.



### Serve the Pumpkin

Use the hollowed out pumpkin as a serving bowl. You can line it with foil or use it as is. Fill the pumpkin with soups, nuts, chips, or toasted pumpkin seeds. Smaller, hollowed out pumpkins can be used as individual soup bowls.

### Pumpkin Memory Book

When you have finished all of your pumpkin projects, save your memories in a pumpkin book. Use orange paper and cut out two pumpkin shapes, including the stem, to be used for the front and back covers of your book. Trace the pumpkin shape onto pieces of white paper and cut on the line for the pages. Insert as many white pumpkin shaped paper pages as you want. Staple the book together on the stem at the top. On each page, draw pictures, write stories, and attach photographs of your pumpkin experiences. You might want to use a photograph of your child and his or her pumpkin on the front cover. Remember to add the date!



## How to Carve a Positively Perfect Pumpkin

Pumpkin carving kits are available wherever you buy pumpkins and make the job so much easier and safer.

- ◆ Select a pumpkin that is free from nicks & bruises.
- ◆ Slant a knife inward when cutting around the stem. This will prevent the top from falling into the pumpkin when you put it back on the top.
- ◆ Make a notch in the top, and the pumpkin so you can line them up easily.
- ◆ Leave at least a 1-inch wall on the pumpkin after scooping out the pulp and seeds. For simple faces, use a permanent marker to draw directly on the pumpkin.
- ◆ Cut along the lines with a pumpkin cutting tool. For more intricate patterns, draw the design on a piece of white paper. Lay the paper on the smoothest side of the pumpkin. Secure it in place with tape, tacks, or toothpicks. Poke toothpicks, a nail, or the appropriate pumpkin tool along the drawn pattern lines. Using a sharp cutting tool, cut along the toothpick marks.
- ◆ To illuminate your pumpkin, cut a large circle in the bottom of the pumpkin. Place a votive candle on a small plate and set the pumpkin on top. Or, cut a hole in the back of the pumpkin and rest a flashlight so that it shines through the pumpkin.
- ◆ Rub vegetable oil or petroleum jelly over the cut out areas of the pumpkin to keep it from drying out so quickly



### The Great Pumpkin Quiz:

1. What color is your pumpkin?
2. Are all pumpkins the same color?
3. What shape is the pumpkin you've picked?
4. How much does it weigh?
5. How many inches around is your pumpkin?
6. Is it more the size of a watermelon or an apple?
7. Are all pumpkins the same shape? Compare them.
8. What is inside of a pumpkin?
9. List some things you can make using a pumpkin.