

## Pumpkins “Pump” Up Nutrition in Fall Meals

**Barbara L. Ames**

Wildcat District Extension Family and Consumer Sciences Agent

Pumpkins aren't just for Halloween! These seasonal superstars are an excellent source of many nutrients including vitamin A in the form of beta carotene, iron, potassium, vitamin C, and dietary fiber. Yet, a cup of pumpkin contains only 49 calories, is low in sodium, and fat.

Research shows that people who eat more vegetables and fruits as part of an overall healthy diet are likely to have a reduced risk of some chronic diseases. Fruits and vegetables provide nutrients vital for the health and maintenance of your body and colorful pumpkins are a great way to eat your fruit!



When selecting a pumpkin for cooking, the best selection is a "pie pumpkin" or "sweet pumpkin." These are smaller than the large jack-o-lantern pumpkins and the flesh is sweeter and less watery. However, you can substitute the jack-o-lantern variety with fairly good results. Look for a pumpkin with 1 to 2 inches of stem left. If the stem is cut down too low the pumpkin will decay quickly or may be decaying at the time of purchase. Avoid pumpkins with blemishes and soft spots. It should be heavy, however shape is unimportant. A lopsided pumpkin is not necessarily a bad pumpkin. Figure one pound of raw, untrimmed pumpkin for each cup finished pumpkin puree. Pumpkin can be cooked by boiling or steaming, or in the oven or microwave.

Besides pie, the versatile pumpkin is found in recipes for nut breads, muffins, cookies, bars, cakes, custards, puddings, cheesecake, soup, and quiche! Because of the high nutrient and fiber content of pumpkin, it is also a health enhancer to other foods. Some ideas for using pumpkin puree to “pump” up nutrition in other foods include the following:

\*Try adding two tablespoons pumpkin per serving to hot oatmeal or cream of wheat. Then serve with brown sugar or sprinkle with cinnamon-sugar.

\*Thicken soups, sauces, beans and chili with mashed pumpkin. Add one-fourth to one-half cup pumpkin to 15-16 ounces of spaghetti sauce, baked beans or chili.

\*Add one-fourth cup pumpkin to the liquid ingredients of your favorite gingerbread mix (14 ounce size).

\*Combine contents of one three-ounce package of butterscotch or vanilla pudding and pie filling mix, two cups of milk, and one-half cup mashed pumpkin. Cook as directed on package.

\*Stir together one cup vanilla low-fat yogurt, one-half cup pumpkin and ¼ teaspoon cinnamon. Keep refrigerated.

\*Add one-fourth to one-half cup pumpkin pulp to two cups of mashed potatoes.

Autumn is here! Celebrate with pumpkin and “pump” up flavor and nutrition in your family’s fall meals.

If you would like more information about all things pumpkin, a great informational source is the University of Illinois Extension site: <https://extension.illinois.edu/pumpkins/default.cfm>.

For more information about these programs and others, contact the Wildcat Extension District offices at: Crawford County, 620-724-8233; Labette County, 620-784-5337; Montgomery County, 620-331-2690; Wilson County, 620-378-2167; Pittsburg Office, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education (EFNEP), 620-232-1930. Wildcat District Extension is on the Web at <http://www.wildcatdistrict.ksu.edu>. Or, like our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/wildcat.extension.district](http://www.facebook.com/wildcat.extension.district).

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