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Pumpkin Picking 101

What is round, smooth, slightly bumpy, and most often shades of deep yellow and orange? If you were thinking of Oranges, you're not wrong. But, in this article, we are referring to pumpkins!

Native to North America, pumpkins are among the oldest domesticated plants, used as early as 7,000 to 5,500 B.C. Pumpkins are widely grown for food, but also make beautiful fall decorations! Pumpkins are commonly carved into decorative jack-o'-lanterns for the Halloween season.

Pumpkins aren't just pretty to look at; they provide a ton of great nutrition. Pumpkins provide a great source of vitamins A and C, potassium, and fiber.

Pumpkins are a type of winter squash that are available in October and November. If you really take a liking to pumpkin, canned pumpkin is a convenient and readily available option year-round. Unopened canned pumpkin is safe to eat for up to years after the 'use by' or 'best by' date if the can has no dents, rust, or swelling. Once opened, canned pumpkin can be kept in the refrigerator for three to four days. Store whole pumpkins in a cool, dark, and dry place for up to 3 months. When preparing pumpkins for consumption, scrub them under running water before cutting or cooking. Once cut, wrap tightly and store in the refrigerator for up to one week.

Pumpkins grown for cooking are called "Pie Pumpkins" and typically weigh between 2 and 10 pounds. Their flesh makes a smooth and flavorful puree. Choose pie pumpkins that are firm and heavy for their size, without cracks or any soft spots. Pumpkins grown for carving are often large and have thinner flesh walls that can be cooked, but the texture and flavor are not always pleasant. Each pound of uncut pumpkin yields 1 to 1½ cups of cooked puree. Pumpkin puree is a great way to add flavor and fiber to your favorite dishes; I enjoy adding it to my morning oatmeal with cinnamon.

There is so much fun to be had with pumpkins; get the whole family involved! When kids help make healthy food, they are more likely to try it!

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