

NEWS RELEASE

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PUMPKIN FOR HALLOWEEN AND BEYOND

Pumpkins, pumpkins, pumpkins! Everywhere you look right now you see pumpkins in all sizes, shapes and colors. Leaves changing colors, scarecrows and pumpkins herald in the change of season even if the weather does not cooperate. Pumpkins are a staple of fall decorating since they can be used for Halloween decorating and beyond. Now is the time to carve your pumpkin into a scary Jack-O-Lantern.

While everyone is thinking decorating with pumpkins this time of the year, pumpkins add a lot to our diet. Rich in nutrients and low in calories, just one half cup of canned pumpkin provides 4 grams of fiber, no fat or cholesterol, and only 50 calories. It also provides enough vitamin A for the entire day.

The most common use for pumpkins is for carving, but if you are using it for cooking, look for pie or sweet varieties. These pumpkins are usually smaller and have a sweeter flesh that is less watery. So when choosing a pumpkin for decorating, look for the Jack-O-Lantern size and choose the smaller ones for eating. It is recommended that you do not eat the Jack-O-Lantern style pumpkins. You can roast the seeds, but once you have cut a face in them and allowed them to sit outside they are no longer safe to eat. Choose a pie pumpkin variety to eat.

To peel a pumpkin, cut off the top and then cut a thin horizontal slice off of the bottom. This will help the pumpkin sit flat on your cutting board. Using a large knife, cut slices of the skin off from top to bottom, working your way around the pumpkin. Cut the pumpkin in half and scoop out the seeds and stringy pulp. Discard the pulp. If you would like to save the seeds for

roasting later, then thoroughly clean the seeds and set them aside. Cut the now empty remaining pumpkin into chunks.

Pumpkin puree can be made by steaming the pumpkin chunks until they are tender. Drain them well. Place the chunks in a food processor or blender and until they are pureed. You can also use a potato masher. To remove any strings that might remain, strain the puree through a fine sieve or strainer.

Another alternative is to bake the unpeeled, seeded pumpkin halves in a 325 degree oven for about one hour or until tender. Scoop out the flesh and then puree. Use the pumpkin puree for your favorite recipes immediately, or you may freeze it for up to one year in a freezer safe container.

You can also purchase canned pumpkin. The work has been done and it is convenient. It also works well in most recipes. When purchasing canned pumpkin, be sure to buy plain pumpkin and not pumpkin pie filling which has sugar and spices already mixed in. Read the label carefully to make sure you are buying what you think you are buying.

Pumpkin is a fall favorite! And it is for more than just decorating. Experiment with different recipes containing pumpkins. Muffins, cookies, loaf breads, cakes, dips, made with pumpkin are all delicious! If you would like to receive a free handout on pumpkins, including how to roast pumpkin seeds, contact me at the Howard County Cooperative Extension Service by calling 870-845-7517. You may also visit our office located on the second floor of the courthouse.

Recipe of the Week

This recipe is sure to be a hit at your Halloween party! It is easy to make. Everyone, kids and adults, will love this recipe. This recipe is from the pumpkin handout mentioned in the above article.

Pumpkin Dip and Gingersnaps

1 (15 oz.) can pumpkin

1 box powdered sugar

16 ounces light cream cheese

2 teaspoons cinnamon

1 teaspoon ginger

Gingersnap cookies

Blend the first five ingredients until mixed well. Serve with gingersnap cookies or graham crackers.