Niobrara County Pumpkin Project (NCPP)

The Niobrara County Pumpkin Project is built to be a lasting community resource by embedding the work within local education, youth development, and community traditions

Beyond the Pie: Exploring the Nutrition, Flavour & Versatility of Specialty Pumpkins



University of Wyoming

Extension

"The University's policy has been, and will continue to be, one of nondiscrimination, offering equal opportunity to all employees and applicants for employment on the basis of their demonstrated ability and competence without regard to such matters as race, sex, gender, color, religion, national origin, disability, age, veteran status, sexual orientation, genetic information, political belief, or other status protected by state and federal statutes or University Regulations."

Team Members & Partners

Kellie Chichester - Project Lead
UWE CVH Educator

Joddee Jacobsen
UWE CVH Program Leader & Educator

Jedidiah Hewlett
UWE ANR Educator

Talli Miller
UWE 4-H Educator

Amy Smith
UWE ANR Educator

McKenna Julian
UWE ANR Educator

Donna Hoffman
UWE ANR Educator & Master Gardener Coordinater



Pumpkins: More Than a Fall Decoration



When most people think of pumpkins, they picture jack-o'-lanterns, pumpkin spice drinks, and holiday desserts. However, pumpkins are much more than a seasonal decoration. They are a nutritious, versatile food that can be enjoyed year-round.

Pumpkins can be:

- Roasted as a side dish
- Blended into soups
- Mashed into purees
- Added to breads and muffins
- Used in pasta dishes
- Combined with grains, beans, and vegetables
- Served as edible bowls for individual meals

Pumpkins belong to the winter squash family and are part of the red and orange vegetable subgroup in the USDA MyPlate eating pattern.

Eating a variety of colorful vegetables helps provide essential vitamins, minerals, fiber, and plant compounds that support overall health.

Source: USDA MyPlate - Vegetables

The Nutritional Power of Pumpkin

- Pumpkin can be served with a variety of spices; try nutmeg, cinnamon, and cloves for a sweeter flavor and chili powder, garlic, and paprika for a savory flavor. Add a sprinkle of rosemary, thyme, or fresh oregano before serving.
- Pumpkins are nutrient dense food; full of fiber, and minerals like magnesium and potassium; they help to build strong bones and teeth and aid in muscle contraction. They provide Vitamin A & C which builds healthy skin and heals wounds.
- Pumpkin nourishes eye health. Vitamin A provides the ability for our body to make a protein called lutein that aids eye health. Vitamin A also nurtures other parts of the eye, like the cornea which helps focus and filter light so you can see clearly.
- Pumpkin is recommended as part of a heart-healthy diet; providing fiber, calcium, potassium, and magnesium which help regulate heartbeat and lower blood pressure.
- One-cup of pumpkin is 30 calories. Pumpkins are fat, cholesterols and sodium free.

Source: https://extension.illinois.edu/pumpkins/pumpkin-recipes

According to USDA FoodData Central, one cup of cooked pumpkin (245 grams) provides approximately:

Pumpkin Nutrition Facts
Calories: 49
Protein: 2 g
Carbohydrate 12 g
Dietary Fiber 3 grams
Calcium 37 mg
Iron 1.4 mg]
Magnesium 22 mg
Potassium 564 mg
Zinc 1 mg
Selenium .50 mg
Vitamin C 12 mg
Niacin 1 mg
Folate 21 mcg
Vitamin A 2650 IU
Vitamin E 3 mg

Why Pumpkin Deserves a Spot on Your Plate

- Immune & Vision Support: The bright orange color of pumpkin is a dead giveaway that it is loaded with beta-carotene, an antioxidant your body converts into Vitamin A. Just one cup of cooked pumpkin provides over 200% of your daily recommended intake, which supports clear eyesight and skin health.
- Disease Prevention: The Vitamin C and antioxidants found in its flesh help combat cell-damaging free radicals, fight infections, and reduce the risk of certain chronic illnesses.
- Digestive Health: High dietary fiber content aids in smooth digestion, promotes a feeling of fullness to assist with weight management, and can help manage cholesterol levels.
- Heart and Blood Pressure Regulation: Pumpkin contains crucial minerals like potassium and magnesium. Potassium is a well-known vasorelaxant that helps control blood pressure and protects cardiovascular health.

Don't Throw Away the Seeds

Extension experts emphasize that the nutritional value doesn't stop at the pulp. As noted by Michigan State University Extension, roasted pumpkin seeds are excellent sources of:

- Monounsaturated fatty acids (heart-healthy fats)
- Concentrated plant protein
- Extra dietary fiber (especially if eaten with the white outer shells still attached)

How to Select and Use Pumpkin

To maximize the flavor and texture on your plate, follow these quick tips:

- Pick the right variety: Avoid large, stringy carving pumpkins. Opt instead for smaller, sweeter varieties often labeled as "pie pumpkins" or "sweet pumpkins".
- Bake healthy substitutions: Instead of sugar-laden pumpkin spice lattes or heavy pies, use pureed pumpkin to cut down on added sugars in pancakes, muffins, or savory soups.
- Roast it: Simply toss cubed pumpkin with a small amount of olive oil, cinnamon, or savory herbs for a simple side dish.

Sources: Alabama Cooperative Extension System: Provided insights on pumpkin as a low-calorie, nutrient-dense fall superfood.
Michigan State University Extension: Highlighted the nutritional profile of pumpkin seeds, including their healthy fats and plant-based protein.
Rutgers Cooperative Extension (NJAES): Shared data regarding the fruit's water content, high levels of beta-carotene (Vitamin A), and overall heart-health benefits.













Choosing the Right Pumpkin for Cooking

Not every pumpkin is created equal!
Carving pumpkins are bred for appearance and may have watery, stringy flesh. Cooking pumpkins are selected for:
Sweeter flavor
Smoother texture
Dense flesh
Better culinary performance
When selecting a pumpkin for eating:
✓ Choose pumpkins that feel heavy for their size
✓ Look for firm skin without soft spots
✓ Avoid pumpkins with mold or damage
✓ Keep stems intact when possible

Source: Purdue Extension FoodLink – Pumpkin





Homemade Pumpkin Puree

Pure Pumpkin. Purely Delicious.

Three Methods to Make Pumpkin Puree

Baking Method

- Wash hands with warm water and soap. Preheat the oven to 375 °F.
- Wash and cut a fresh baking pumpkin in half and discard the strings and seeds.
- In a shallow baking dish, place the two halves face down and cover with baking foil.
- Bake pumpkin at 375 °F for 1 ½ hours, or until tender.
- Remove the pumpkin from the oven and allow it to cool.
- After cooling, scoop out the flesh of the pumpkin and mash it into a puree. You can do this by hand, with a mixer or food processor.
- For a silkier texture, press the pumpkin puree through a sieve.

Microwave Method

- Wash hands with warm water and soap.
- Wash and cut a fresh baking pumpkin in half and discard the strings and seeds.
- In a shallow microwave-safe baking dish, place the two halves face down. Cover tightly with a microwave-safe wrap to prevent steam and moisture from escaping during cooking time.
- Microwave on high power for seven minutes per pound of pumpkin. Repeat this process until the pumpkin is tender.
- **CAUTION:** When removing plastic wrap, pull the wrap furthest from you back towards you, allowing hot steam to escape away from you.
- Wash your hands and peel the skin from the cooled pumpkin using your fingers.
- Puree peeled pumpkin using a hand masher, mixer, potato ricer, or a food processor.

Stovetop Method

- Wash hands with warm water and soap.
- Wash and cut a fresh baking pumpkin in half and discard the strings and seeds.
- Cut pumpkin into uniform 1-inch cubes.
- Place pumpkin in a large saucepan or stockpot and cover with water.
- Bring pumpkin to a boil and reduce the heat to low, and simmer for 25-30 minutes, or until tender. Stir pumpkins occasionally to prevent scorching.
- Remove pumpkins from heat, drain, and allow to cool.
- Wash hands and remove the skin from the pumpkins, it should skip right off.
- Puree pumpkin using a hand masher, mixer, potato ricer, or food processor.

Storing Your Fresh Pumpkin Puree

Fresh pumpkin puree can be refrigerated for up to three days or stored in the freezer for up to six months.

Whether you make fresh pumpkin puree or purchase it at the grocery store, pumpkin is a delicious and healthy addition to your fall food lineup. If you buy pumpkin puree from the grocery store, pay close attention and ensure you are getting 100% pumpkin puree with no added salt or sugar.

Sources

Brennan, D. (2020, September 18). Pumpkin: Health benefits, nutrients per serving, and more. WebMD. Retrieved October 13, 2022, from https://www.webmd.com/diet/health-benefits-pumpkin#:~:text=It%20offers%20a%20long%20list,and%20your%20blood%20pressure%20low.







Pumpkin Seeds: A Delicious & Nutritious Bonus

Before discarding pumpkin seeds, consider roasting them!
Pumpkin seeds provide:

- Protein
- Healthy fats
- Magnesium
- Zinc

Simple Roasted Pumpkin Seeds

- Clean the pulp off with cold water and air dry seeds.
- Toss with a small amount of oil.
- Add seasonings of your choice
- Spread in a single layer on a parchment lined baking sheet. Roast at 350 degrees for 20 to 30 minutes until crisp - stir halfway through the cooking time.

Seasoning ideas:

- Cinnamon and a small amount of sugar
- Garlic and herbs
- Chili powder
- Ranch seasoning

Source: North Dakota State University Extension
"Field to Fork: Pumpkins"

Gourd-geous Facts: Get to Know Your Pumpkin!

- Pumpkins are usually orange but can sometimes be yellow, white, green or red.
- The name pumpkin comes from the Greek word 'pepon', meaning 'large melon'.
- Pumpkins have thick shells which contain pulp and seeds.
- Scientifically speaking, pumpkins are a fruit (they contain seeds) but when it comes to cooking, they are often referred to as vegetables.
- Pumpkins are usually shaped like a sphere (ball).
- They vary in weight but an average sized pumpkin might weigh around 13 pounds (6 kilograms).
- Giant pumpkins can be grown for competitions, with some weighing over 1000 pounds! (450 kilograms). In 2010, the world record was 1810 pounds! That's huge!!
- Pumpkin plants feature both male and female flowers, with bees typically being involved in pollination (the transfer of pollen).
- Over 1 billion pounds (450 million kgs) of pumpkin are produced in the US every year.
- As a food, pumpkin can be baked, roasted, steamed or boiled.
- Pumpkin soup is popular, as are roasted pumpkin seeds.
- Pumpkin pie is a sweet dessert that originates in North America and is traditionally eaten during harvest time and holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas.
- Pumpkins are popular decorations during Halloween. A carved pumpkin illuminated by candles is known as a 'jack-o-lantern'. The tradition is believed to have come from Ireland, where they used to carve faces into turnips, beet and other root vegetables as part of the Gaelic festival of Samhain.
- 100 grams of pumpkin produces around 26 calories of energy.

Source: https://www.sciencekids.co.nz/sciencefacts/food/pumpkins.html

Musquee de Provence



Musquée de Provence is a French heirloom pumpkin known for its beautiful, flattened shape, deep ribs, and warm tan-orange skin. This variety is prized for its dense, sweet, orange flesh and is often used for roasting, soups, purees, and baking.
The thick flesh develops a rich, almost nutty flavor when cooked, making it an excellent choice for recipes where pumpkin is the star ingredient.
Best Culinary Uses
✓ Pumpkin puree
✓ Creamy soups
✓ Roasted vegetable dishes
✓ Pumpkin bread and muffins
✓ Pasta sauces
Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds — Musquée de Provence Pumpkin

Wee Be Little

The Wee Be Little is a true miniature, baseball-sized pumpkin growing on compact bush-type plants. Winning the All-America Selections award in 1999, it produces 8 to 16-ounce, deep-orange fruits with smooth skin ideal for painting, crafting, or small-space gardens. They mature in about 85 to 95 days.
Best Culinary Uses
✓ Individual stuffed pumpkins
✓ Roasted side dishes
✓ Table presentations
✓ Mini desserts
(Pinetree Garden Seeds)



Cinnamon Girl

Cinnamon Girl pumpkins are a small, orange pumpkin variety selected for sweet flavor and smooth texture. This variety is often used similarly to pie pumpkins and works well for purees, baked goods, and desserts.
Best Culinary Uses
✓ Pumpkin puree
✓ Pumpkin pie
✓ Muffins
✓ Pancakes
✓ Breads
Seed Savers Exchange — Cinnamon Girl Pumpkin



Jarrahdale Pumpkin



(Jarrahdale pumpkins are known for their unusual blue-gray skin, deep ribs, and vibrant golden-orange flesh. Originally developed in Australia, this variety is valued for its dense texture, mild sweetness, and versatility in the kitchen. Because of its firm flesh, Jarrahdale holds its shape well when roasted and creates a smooth, flavorful puree for soups, sauces, and baked dishes.
Best Culinary Uses
✓ Roasted pumpkin
✓ Soups
✓ Chili
✓ Grain bowls
✓ Pasta dishes
✓ Purees
(Territorial Seed Company)

Marina di Chioggia



Marina di Chioggia is an Italian heirloom pumpkin famous for its deeply textured, dark green skin and sweet, dense orange flesh.
This variety has been treasured in Italian cooking because of its rich flavor and creamy texture. It is especially well suited for recipes where pumpkin flavor is the focus.
Best Culinary Uses
✓ Pumpkin puree
✓ Pasta filling
✓ Gnocchi
✓ Soups
✓ Baking
✓ Roasting
(Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds)



Pumpkin Storage Tips

Whole Pumpkins

Store:

- Cool
- Dry
- Well ventilated
-

Avoid:

- Moisture
- Freezing temperatures
- Direct sunlight

Cut Pumpkin

Refrigerate:

- Use within several days

Freeze:

- Cooked pumpkin puree freezes well

Source:

National Center for Home Food Preservation

Pumpkin Recipe Substitution Guide

Recipe Uses	***Substitute***
Pumpkin puree	Cooked winter squash puree
Oil in some baked goods	Pumpkin puree
Sweet potato recipes	Pumpkin puree
Butternut squash recipes	Cooking pumpkin



Pumpkins: Colorful, Creative, and Delicious

Specialty pumpkins remind us that healthy eating can be colorful, creative, and fun. Whether growing them in a garden, selecting them at a farmers market, or experimenting in the kitchen, pumpkins offer opportunities to explore nutrition, agriculture, and culinary traditions.

From the tiny Wee Be Little to the dramatic Marina di Chioggia, each variety tells a storyand each one offers a delicious way to add more vegetables to the plate.



Pumpkin Recipes

Roasted Pumpkin Soup



Recipe Source:
Adapted from University of Illinois Extension pumpkin preparation and recipe guidance.
Source:
University of Illinois Extension Pumpkin Resources

Ingredients

4 cups roasted Musquée de Provence pumpkin
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 medium onion, chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
4 cups low-sodium vegetable broth

- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ginger
- Black pepper to taste

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
2. Cut pumpkin into chunks and roast until tender.
3. Sauté onion and garlic until softened.
4. Add pumpkin, broth, and spices.
5. Simmer for 15–20 minutes.
6. Blend until smooth.

Nutrition Note: Pumpkin provides vitamin A, fiber, potassium, and naturally occurring carotenoids.
Nutrition Source: USDA FoodData Central – Pumpkin, cooked

Pumpkin Breakfast Muffins



Recipe Source:
Adapted from USDA MyPlate pumpkin recipes.

Ingredients

1½ cups pumpkin puree
2 eggs
½ cup unsweetened applesauce
⅓ cup maple syrup
1½ cups whole wheat flour

- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda

Directions

- Heat oven to 350°F.
- Combine wet ingredients.
- Add dry ingredients and mix until combined.
- Spoon into muffin cups.
- Bake 18–22 minutes.

Stuffed Mini Pumpkins

Recipe Source: Extension-inspired adaptation based on winter squash stuffing methods. Purdue Extension FoodLink Pumpkin



Ingredients

4 Wee Be Little pumpkins
1 cup cooked quinoa or brown rice
½ cup black beans
½ cup corn
½ cup diced peppers
½ cup shredded cheese
Herbs and seasoning

Directions

Wash pumpkins and remove tops.
Scoop out seeds.
Roast pumpkins at 375°F for 20-25 minutes.
Mix filling ingredients.
Fill pumpkins and bake until heated through.

Nutrition Connection

Combining pumpkin with whole grains and beans creates a balanced meal containing vegetables, fiber, and plant-based protein.
Source: USDA MyPlate – Building Healthy Meals

Pumpkin Chicken Curry



Ingredients

- 2 Tablespoons oil, divided
- 1 lb. boneless, skinless chicken breast halves, cubed
- ¾ cup chopped onion
- 1 Tablespoon grated fresh ginger
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2 Tablespoons curry powder
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon coriander
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup 100% pure pumpkin
- ½ cup unsweetened lite coconut milk

Directions

- Wash hands with soap and water.
- Heat 1 Tablespoon oil in skillet over medium heat.
- Brown chicken on all sides, but don't cook all the way through.
- Transfer chicken to a plate. Heat remaining oil in same skillet.
- Sauté onion, ginger and garlic for 2-3 minutes.
- Stir in spices and salt.
- Cook for an additional minute.
- Stir in pumpkin and coconut milk.
- Add browned chicken and simmer for 8-10 minutes or until chicken reaches 165°F as measured with food thermometer.
- Serve over rice.

Recipe source: adapted from Libby's Pumpkin

.

Pumpkin Raisin Bread



Total Time2hours hrs 15 minutes
Source: University of Wyoming Extension
https://uwyoextension.org/uwnutrition/recipes/pumpkin-raisin-bread/
Servings: 12 slices

Ingredients

1 1/2 cups whole wheat flour
1/2 cup brown sugar packed
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1 cup canned pumpkin
1/2 cup raisins
1/4 cup non-fat vanilla Greek yogurt
1/4 cup unsweetened applesauce
2 egg whites

Directions

Wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds.
Do not taste or eat any raw dough or batter made with uncooked flour and/or raw eggs.
Preheat oven to 350°F.
Mix dry ingredients in a large bowl. Mix wet ingredients in a bowl. Add wet ingredients to the dry ingredients bowl and stir until the mixture is uniform.
Either spoon the mixture into a non-stick muffin tray or a bread pan.
Bake muffins for 25 minutes or a loaf for 1 hour 15 minutes until golden brown and a toothpick inserted in the center of the bread comes out clean. The internal temperature of the bread should be 200-208°F. If browning too quickly, tent the pan with foil.
Remove from the oven and allow the bread to cool for 10 minutes on a wire rack. Run a knife around the loaf to loosen it from the pan before removing it from the pan and slicing

Roasted Pumpkin Grain Bowl

Recipe Source:
Extension-inspired adaptation based on roasted vegetable and whole grain meal recommendations.
Source:
Purdue Extension FoodLink Pumpkin

Ingredients

3 cups roasted pumpkin cubes
2 cups cooked brown rice or quinoa
1 cup roasted vegetables
½ cup chickpeas
Fresh herbs
Yogurt or tahini dressing

Directions

Roast pumpkin cubes until tender.
Prepare grain base.
Add vegetables and chickpeas.
Top with herbs and dressing.
Extension Tip: Pairing pumpkin with whole grains and legumes creates a satisfying meal with fiber, protein, and a variety of nutrients.

Pumpkin Chili

Recipe Source: Adapted from USDA MyPlate healthy recipe concepts featuring vegetables, beans, and whole foods.
Source: MyPlate Kitchen



Ingredients
2 cups roasted pumpkin, cubed
2 cans low-sodium beans, drained and rinsed
1 can diced tomatoes
1 medium onion, chopped
1 bell pepper, chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
2 cups low-sodium broth
2 teaspoons chili powder
1 teaspoon cumin
Directions
Sauté onion, pepper, and garlic until softened.
Add pumpkin, beans, tomatoes, broth, and seasonings.
Simmer 30 minutes.
Serve warm.
Nutrition Connection:This recipe combines:
Orange vegetables for vitamin A
Beans for fiber and plant protein
Vegetables for added nutrients

Savory Pumpkin Pasta Sauce

Recipe Source:
Adapted from Extension guidance for incorporating pureed winter squash into meals.
Preparation Guidance Source:
University of Illinois Extension Pumpkin Resources



Ingredients
2 cups pumpkin puree
1 cup low-sodium broth
½ cup milk
2 cloves garlic, minced
½ teaspoon dried sage
Black pepper
¼ cup Parmesan cheese
Directions
Sauté garlic until fragrant.
Add pumpkin, broth, milk, and seasonings.
Simmer until smooth.
Stir in Parmesan.
Serve over whole grain pasta.

Nutrition Connection
Using pumpkin in place of heavier cream-based sauces can increase vegetable intake while adding fiber and vitamin A.
Nutrition Source:
USDA FoodData Central – Pumpkin
https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/

Pumpkin Bread

Recipe Source:
Colorado State University Extension's Eating Smart Being Active

Ingredients

Nonstick cooking spray
2 cups all-purpose flour
2 cups whole wheat flour
1/2 cup non-fat dry milk
1 1/4 cup sugar
1 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons baking powder
2 1/2 teaspoons pumpkin pie spice
1 (15-ounce) can pumpkin or 2 cups homemade pumpkin puree
3/4 cup applesauce, unsweetened
1/2 cup vegetable/canola oil
4 eggs
1/2 cup water

Directions:

1) Preheat oven to 350 °F.
2) Spray two loaf pans or muffin tins (for 30 muffins) with nonstick cooking spray.
3) In a large bowl, mix all-purpose flour, whole wheat flour, non-fat dry milk, sugar, baking soda, salt, baking powder, and pumpkin pie spice.
4) In a second bowl, beat pumpkin, applesauce, oil, eggs, and water until blended.
5) Add pumpkin mixture to flour mixture and stir with a spoon just until moistened. Do not over mix. Pour batter into 2 loaf pans or muffin tins to no more than 2/3 full.
7) Bake loaves for 60-75 minutes, or muffins for 20 minutes, until a toothpick inserted into the middle comes out clean.
8) Cool on a rack and remove from pans after 10 minutes.
9) If not eaten right away, wrap the loaves (or muffins) in foil or a plastic bag and store in the freezer. Thaw for 20-30 seconds in the microwave (for muffins) or overnight in the refrigerator.
Nutrition Note: Choosing whole grain flour and adding pumpkin increases the nutrient value of traditional quick breads.





University of Wyoming

Extension

"The University's policy has been, and will continue to be, one of nondiscrimination, offering equal opportunity to all employees and applicants for employment on the basis of their demonstrated ability and competence without regard to such matters as race, sex, gender, color, religion, national origin, disability, age, veteran status, sexual orientation, genetic information, political belief, or other status protected by state and federal statutes or University Regulations."

