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Much Ado about "Pumpkin"

A pumpkin is a gourd-like squash of the genus *Cucurbita* and the family Cucurbitaceae. It commonly refers to cultivars of any one of the species *Cucurbita pepo*, *Cucurbita mixta*, *Cucurbita maxima*, and *Cucurbita moschata*, and is native to North America. They have a thick, orange or yellow shell, grooved from the stem to the bottom, containing the seeds and pulp. Pumpkins are widely grown for commercial use, and are used both in food and recreation. Pumpkin pie, is a traditional part of Thanksgiving meals in the United States, and pumpkins are frequently carved with faces as jack o' lanterns for Halloween.

The word pumpkin originates from the word *pepon*, which is Greek for "large melon". The French adapted this word to *pompon*, which the British changed to *pumpion* and later American colonists changed that to the word we use today, "pumpkin". The origin of pumpkins is not definitively known, although they are thought to have originated in North America. The oldest evidence, pumpkin-related seeds dating between 7000 and 5500 BC, were found in Mexico. Pumpkins are a

squash-like fruit that range in size from less than 1 pound to over 1,000 pounds.

Pumpkins are monoecious, having both male and female flowers on the same plant. The female flower is distinguished by the small ovary at the base of the petals. These bright and colorful flowers have extremely short life spans and may only open for as short a time as one day. The

color of pumpkins is derived from the orange pigments abundant in them. The main nutrients are lutein and both alpha and beta carotene, the latter of which generates vitamin A in the body.

Pumpkins are grown all around the world for a variety of reasons ranging from agricultural purposes (such as animal feed) to commercial and ornamental sales. The biggest international producers of pumpkins include the United States, Canada, Mexico, India, and China.

The largest pumpkins are *Cucurbita maxima*. They were cultivated from the hubbard squash genotype, crossed with kabocha-pumpkin types by enthusiast farmers through intermittent effort since the early 19th century. Weigh-off competitions for giant pumpkins are a popular festival activity. The world record held at 460 pounds until 1981, when Howard Dill (of Nova Scotia) broke the record with a pumpkin weighing 493.5 pounds. Dill patented the seeds used to grow this giant pumpkin, deeming them Dill's Atlantic Giant seeds, and drawing growers from around the world. Dill is credited for all of the giant pumpkins today, most of which are borne from crossing and re-crossing his patented seed with other varieties. By 1994, the Giant pumpkin crossed the 1,000-pound mark. The current world record holder is Chris Stevens's 1,810-pound



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Atlantic Giant pumpkin, which in October 2010 surpassed Christy Harp's previous 2009 record of 1,725 pounds.

Pumpkins are very versatile in their uses for cooking. Most parts of the pumpkin are edible, including the fleshy shell, the seeds, the leaves, and even the flowers. In the United States and Canada, pumpkin is a popular Halloween and Thanksgiving staple. When ripe, the pumpkin can be boiled, baked, steamed, or roasted. In its native North America, it is a very important, traditional part of the autumn harvest, eaten mashed and making its way into soups and purees.

Often, it is made into pie, various kinds of which are a traditional staple of the Canadian and American Thanksgiving holidays. In Canada, Mexico, the United States, Europe and China, the seeds are often roasted and eaten as a snack.

Pumpkins that are still small and green may be eaten in the same way as squash or zucchini. In the Middle East, pumpkin is used for sweet dishes. South Asian countries such as India, pumpkin is cooked with butter, sugar, and spices. In China, the leaves of the pumpkin plant are consumed as a cooked vegetable or in soups. Australia and New Zealand, pumpkin is often roasted in conjunction with other vegetables. Japan, small pumpkins are served in savory dishes, including tempura. The seeds are a popular sunflower seed substitute. In Thailand, small pumpkins are steamed with custard inside and served as a

dessert. Italy uses pumpkins with cheeses as a savory stuffing for ravioli. Also, pumpkin can be used to flavor both alcoholic and nonalcoholic beverages.

In the southwestern United States and Mexico, pumpkin and squash flowers are a popular and widely available food item. They may be used to garnish dishes, and they may be dredged in a batter then fried in oil. Pumpkin leaves are a popular vegetable in the Western and central regions of Kenya, whereas the pumpkin itself is usually boiled or steamed. The seeds are popular with children who roast them on a pan before eating them.



Preliminary research indicates that phytochemicals found in pumpkin may favorably affect insulin and glucose levels in laboratory diabetes models. Pumpkin phytochemicals and nutrients remain under preliminary research for potential biological effects. In its raw state pumpkin is an extremely good source of vitamins A and C, essential for maintaining good

eyesight and a healthy immune system, among other functions. It is also high in potassium, manganese, copper and one of the B vitamins, riboflavin. Then consider the fact that pumpkin contains considerable amounts of magnesium, phosphorus, iron, folate, vitamins E and B6, niacin, thiamin and pantothenic acid and it is low in salt, cholesterol and saturated fat.

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Chipotle Pumpkin Soup

Ingredients

- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 medium yellow onion, chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1-2 chipotle peppers (canned in adobo, 1 for mild, 2 for spicy), chopped
- 8 cups chopped, cooked pumpkin* (1-7-8 pound cooking pumpkin to yield 8 cups cooked pumpkin, or 3 -15 ounce cans of canned pumpkin)
- 4 to 6 cups chicken stock, depending on desired thickness and how thick your pumpkin purée is (use vegetable stock for vegetarian option, can sub water for some of the stock)
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano or 1/2 teaspoon ground fresh oregano
- 2 teaspoons salt, more to taste
- 2 Tbsp lime juice

Garnishes:

- Toasted, shelled pumpkin seeds (pepitas)
- Cilantro
- Creme fresca, creme fraiche or sour cream thinned with a little water so that it's runny.

* To cook fresh pumpkin, use a good cooking pumpkin (i.e. sugar pumpkin, fairytale pumpkin, hubbard, or kabocha pumpkin), cut in half, scoop out the seeds, place the pumpkin cut side down on a foil-lined, rimmed baking sheet. Bake at 350°F for about an hour, or until soft. Scoop out the pumpkin flesh or cut away the skin. Let cool. Freeze for long term storage.

Directions

Heat oil in a large pot (8-quart) on medium high heat. Add the onions and cook for 3-4 minutes, until softened. Add the garlic, cumin, and chipotle, cook for 1 minute more.

Add the pumpkin, chicken stock, oregano, and salt. Bring to a simmer, reduce the heat and simmer for 20 minutes, partially covered.

If you are working with raw pumpkin seeds, now would be a good time to toast them. Just spread them out in an even layer in a frying pan on medium high heat. Stir with a wooden spoon while toasting, until the pumpkin seeds are fragrant and are lightly browned. Remove to a bowl.

Remove the soup from heat. Working in batches of 2 cups each, purée the soup in batches, and starting on a slow speed puree the cooked pumpkin. Return the puréed soup to the pot.

Add lime juice. Adjust seasonings to taste, adding more salt, cumin, oregano, or chipotle to taste. If the soup is too thick, add more stock or water to desired consistency.

Serve with toasted pumpkin seeds (pepitas), crema fresca drizzled over the top, and chopped cilantro.

Yield: Makes 2 to 2 1/2 quarts.

Local HARVEST

Royal Food Service is your place for the freshest local & regional produce for schools!

GEORGIA PRODUCT	FARMS	LOCATION
APPLES, GOLD 125 CT	Mercier Orchards	Blue Ridge, GA
APPLES, RED DELICIOUS 125 CT	Mercier Orchards	Blue Ridge, GA
CABBAGE, GREEN	Coggins Farms	Lake Park, GA
CABBAGE, RED	Coggins Farms	Lake Park, GA
CHEESE, ASHER BLUE	Sweet Grass Dairy	Thomasville, GA
CHEESE, GREEN HILL	Sweet Grass Dairy	Thomasville, GA
CHEESE, THOMASVILLE TOMME	Sweet Grass Dairy	Thomasville, GA
CORN, YELLOW	Moore & Porter	Thomasville, GA
CORN, WHITE	Moore & Porter	Thomasville, GA
CUCUMBERS	Coggins Farms	Lake Park, GA
EGGPLANT, CHOICE	Coggins Farms	Lake Park, GA
LETTUCE, GA GOURMET MIX	Stone Creek Hydroponics	Hartwell, GA
PEPPER, GREEN BELL	Coggins Farms	Lake Park, GA
POTATOES, SWEET (Evangeline)	Coggins Farms	Lake Park, GA
POTATOES, SWEET (Georgia Red)	Coggins Farms	Lake Park, GA
POTATOES, SWEET (Muraski-Japanese)	Coggins Farms	Lake Park, GA
SQUASH, BUTTERNUT	Coggins Farms	Lake Park, GA
SQUASH, SPAGHETTI	Coggins Farms	Lake Park, GA
SQUASH, YELLOW	Coggins Farms	Lake Park, GA
SQUASH, ZUCCHINI	Coggins Farms	Lake Park, GA
YOGURT, GREEK ASSORTED	Atlanta Fresh Artesian Creamery	Norcross, GA
ALABAMA PRODUCT	FARMS	LOCATION
EGGS, LIQUID 2/20# BOX	Rembrandt Foods	Abbeville, AL
EGGS, YOLK PLAIN	Rembrandt Foods	Abbeville, AL
FLORIDA PRODUCT	FARMS	LOCATION
BEANS, GREEN TIPPED	Pero Family Farms/Hugh Branch Farms	Delray Beach/ South Bay, FL
GRAPEFRUIT, RED	D & E Farms	Plant City, FL
JUICE, ORANGE & GRAPEFRUIT	Orchid Island Juice Co.	Ft. Pierce, FL
MUSHROOMS, WHITE BUTTON	West Coast Mushroom Co.	Quincy, FL
ORANGES	D & E Farms	Plant City, FL
PEPPERS, VEGGIE SWEETS	Pero Family Farms	Delray Beach, FL
TANGERINES	D & E Farms	Plant City, FL
NORTH CAROLINA PRODUCT	FARMS	LOCATION
APPLES, GALA 125 CT	AppleWedge Packers	Hendersonville, NC
APPLES, GALA 100 CT	AppleWedge Packers	Hendersonville, NC
APPLES, GALA 88 CT	AppleWedge Packers	Hendersonville, NC
APPLES, GOLD 125 CT	AppleWedge Packers	Hendersonville, NC
APPLES, RED DELICIOUS 125 CT	AppleWedge Packers	Hendersonville, NC
APPLES, ROME 125 CT	AppleWedge Packers	Hendersonville, NC
POTATOES, SWEET	Wayne Bailey Co.	Chadbourne, NC
TOMATOES, GRAPE/CHERRY/ROMA/ROUND	Williams Farms	Lawndale, NC
SOUTH CAROLINA PRODUCT	FARMS	LOCATION
BEETS, RED	Clayton Rawl Farms	Lexington, SC
CILANTRO	Clayton Rawl Farms	Lexington, SC
CORN, YELLOW & WHITE	Clayton Rawl Farms	Lexington, SC
CUCUMBER	Clayton Rawl Farms	Lexington, SC
GREENS TURNIP MUSTARD & COLLARD	Clayton Rawl Farms	Lexington, SC
EGGPLANT	Clayton Rawl Farms	Lexington, SC
KALE	Sunny Creek Farm	Tryon, SC
PARSLEY	Clayton Rawl Farms	Lexington, SC
PEPPERS, GREEN BELL	Clayton Rawl Farms	Lexington, SC
SQUASH, YELLOW	Clayton Rawl Farms	Lexington, SC
SQUASH, ZUCCHINI	Clayton Rawl Farms	Lexington, SC
TOMATOES, GRAPE/CHERRY/ROMA/ROUND	Clayton Rawl Farms	Lexington, SC
TURNIP ROOTS	Clayton Rawl Farms	Lexington, SC
TENNESSEE	FARMS	LOCATION
TOMATOES	Williams Farms	Unicoi, TN
EAST	FARMS	LOCATION
CABBAGE, GREEN	Maat Produce	Millburg, Mi
CABBAGE, RED	Maat Produce	Millburg, Mi
CARROTS, JUMBO 50#	Maat Produce	Millburg, Mi
PEPPERS, JALAPENO	Voyager Farms	Benton Harbor, Mi
RADISH, RED	Maat Produce	Millburg, Mi
SQUASH, ACORN	Maat Produce	Millburg, Mi
SQUASH, BUTTERNUT	Maat Produce	Millburg, Mi
SQUASH, SPAGHETTI	Maat Produce	Millburg, Mi

