

NOVEMBER – Featured Vegetable: PUMPKIN



WASH. COOK. EAT.

(how easy is that?)

The pumpkin is native to warmer parts of the United States and is an economically important member of the gourd family. They also range in sizes from Jack-be-Little miniatures to giant Mammoth Golds that weigh in at hundreds of pounds. The seeds from a carved jack-o'-lantern make a great snack and addition to salads, soups and casseroles. If you are interested in cooking fresh pumpkins, look for those labeled as "pie pumpkins" or "sweet pumpkins."

Facts

The pumpkin is related to the zucchini.

Pumpkin growers often compete to see whose pumpkins are the most massive. Festivals dedicated to the pumpkin and these competitions are relatively widespread and some form tourist attractions in their own right, for example in Half Moon Bay, California.

The world record holder for the largest pumpkin topped the scales at 1,131 pounds! However, in 2005, a pumpkin raised by Larry Checkon from Northern Cambria, Pennsylvania weighed 1,469 lb (666 kg). It is technically a "squash," *Cucurbita maxima*, and was of the public variety "Atlantic Giant," which is the "giant" variety - culminated from the simple hubbard squash by enthusiast farmers through intermittent effort since the mid 1800s.

Pumpkins are orange because they contain massive amounts of lutein, alpha- and beta-carotene. These nutrients turn to vitamin A in the body.

Using pumpkins as lanterns at Halloween is based on an ancient Celtic custom brought to America by Irish immigrants. All Hallows Eve on 31 October marked the end of the old Celtic calendar year, and on that night hollowed-out turnips, beets and rutabagas with a candle inside were placed on windowsills and porches to welcome home spirits of deceased ancestors and ward off evil spirits and a restless soul called "Stingy Jack," hence the name "Jack-o'-lantern."

The city of Keene, New Hampshire currently holds the world record for the most lit pumpkins in one location: 28,985

"Pumpkin" is sometimes used as an affectionate term, often referring to one's significant other. For example: "I love you, Pumpkin Doodle."

The pumpkin is the state fruit of New Hampshire.

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History

Pumpkins were among the first foods from the "New World" adopted in Europe, probably due to a European cousin: Lagenaria.

Where Grown

Illinois produces more pumpkins than any other state in the United States; Michigan is a distant second.

Types

Pumpkins come in many varieties, with such names as Spooktacular, Funny Face, Jumpin' Jack, Munchkin, and Sweetie Pie.

Nutrients

- High in vitamin A (beta-carotene)