

Pump Up the Curriculum with Pumpkins

Pumpkins, Pumpkins, Pumpkins



Pumpkin Facts

- Pumpkins are not vegetables... they're fruits!
- Pumpkins, gourds, and other varieties of squash are all members of the family Cucurbitaceae, which also includes cucumbers, gherkins, and melons. Pumpkins grow on vines and bushes. Most pumpkins are orange, but some are white, yellow, or other colors.
- Pumpkins have been grown in America for over 5,000 years. They are indigenous to the western hemisphere and were completely unknown in Europe before the time of Columbus.
- In 1584, the French explorer Jacques Cartier reported from the St. Lawrence region that he had found "gros melons", which was translated into English as "ponpions," or pumpkins.
- There was probably some kind of pumpkin served at the first Thanksgiving Feast. Pumpkins and other forms of squash made up one leg of the triad maize, beans, and squash -- that once formed the basic diet of American Indians.
- Pumpkin seeds can be roasted as a snack.
- Pumpkins contain potassium and Vitamin A.
- Pumpkins are used for feed for animals.
- Pumpkin flowers are edible.
- Pumpkins are used to make soups, pies and breads.
- Pumpkins are members of the vine crops family called cucurbits.
- Pumpkins originated in Central America.
- In early colonial times, pumpkins were used as an ingredient for the crust of pies, not the filling.
- Pumpkins were once recommended for removing freckles and curing snake bites.
- Pumpkins range in size from less than a pound to over 1,000 pounds.
- The name pumpkin originated from "pepon" - the Greek word for "large melon."
- The Connecticut field variety is the traditional American pumpkin.
- Pumpkins are 90 percent water.
- Eighty percent of the pumpkin supply in the United States is available in October.
- In colonial times, Native Americans roasted long strips of pumpkin in an open fire.
- Colonists sliced off pumpkin tips; removed seeds and filled the insides with milk, spices and honey. This was baked in hot ashes and is the origin of pumpkin pie.
- Native Americans flattened strips of pumpkins, dried them and made mats.
- Native Americans called pumpkins "isqoutm squash."
- Native Americans used pumpkin seeds for food and medicine.
- That pumpkins are grown all over the world?

Pumpkin, one of the common names for a genus of flowering plants that are characteristically spreading vines with showy yellow-orange flowers, large lobed leaves, and long twisting tendrils. The pumpkin genus is native to warmer parts of America and is an economically important member of the gourd family.

- Pumpkins, squash, and some kinds of gourd are the fruits of four different species of this genus. Summer squash is eaten when the fruit is immature. Winter squash is derived from all four species and is eaten after the fruit has matured. Winter squash may be stored for winter consumption, hence the name. All four species also produce pumpkins, which are similar to winter squash. They are used mainly as pie filling and as jack-o'-lanterns.
- **Scientific classification:** Pumpkins make up the genus *Cucurbita* of the family Cucurbitaceae. The four different species of the genus producing pumpkins, squash, and some kinds of gourd are classified as *Cucurbita maxima*, *Cucurbita mixta*, *Cucurbita moschata*, and *Cucurbita pepo*. Summer squash is from *Cucurbita pepo*.
- Pumpkin plants produce round or oval fruits that have hard shells and coarse, stringy pulp. A central cavity within the fruit holds the seeds. Most pumpkins weigh from 15-30 pounds, but some can weigh as much as 200 pounds. Most pumpkins are orange, but can come in white, yellow, and other colors.
- Pumpkins are low in calories, fat, and sodium and high in fiber. They are good sources of Vitamin A, Vitamin B, potassium, protein, and iron. People cook them in various ways, especially as pumpkin pie. Pumpkin seeds, which provide protein and iron, are a popular snack. Farmers use them as livestock feed. And in our country, people of all ages enjoy carving pumpkins into jack-o'-lanterns for Halloween.

- The largest pumpkin ever grown was 1,061 pounds. It was grown by Paula and Nathan Zehr in Lowville, New York in 1996.
- The largest pumpkin pie ever baked was 350 pounds and 5 feet in diameter.
- Six of the seven continents can grow pumpkins including Alaska! Antarctica is the only continent that they won't grow in.
- That the "pumpkin capital" of the world is Morton, Illinois?
This self proclaimed pumpkin capital is where you'll find the home of the Libby corporation's pumpkin industry.
- That the Irish brought this tradition of pumpkin carving to America?
The tradition originally started with the carving of turnips. When the Irish immigrated to the U.S., they found pumpkins a plenty and they were much easier to carve for their ancient holiday.
- Each year pumpkin growers produce gigantic pumpkins in a contest to grow the world's biggest pumpkin. The largest pumpkin ever was grown in 1996 and weighed 1,061 pounds. Have your students keep an eye on the news to see if this year's crop of giant pumpkins can break the 1996 record.



History

Pumpkins probably originated in North America. Seeds from related plants dating back to 7000 to 5500 B.C. have been found in Mexico. One of America's first folk songs praised the humble but essential pumpkin:

**For pottage and puddings and custards and pies
Our pumpkins and parsnips are common supplies.
We have pumpkin at morning and pumpkin at noon,
If it were not for pumpkin, we should be undone.
Pumpkin Trivia**

In 1584, after French explorer Jacques Cartier explored the St. Lawrence region of North America, he reported finding "gros melons." The name was translated into English as "pompions," which has since evolved into the modern "pumpkin."

Pumpkins are believed to have originated in North America. Seeds from related plants have been found in Mexico dating back to 7000 to 5500 B.C.

References to pumpkins date back many centuries. The name pumpkin originated from the Greek word for "large melon" which is "pepon." "Pepon" was changed by the French into "pompon." The English changed "pompon" to "Pumpion." American colonists changed "pumpion" into "pumpkin."

Native American Indians used pumpkin as a staple in their diets centuries before the pilgrims landed. They also dried strips of pumpkin and wove them into mats. Indians would also roast long strips of pumpkin on the open fire and eat them. When white settlers arrived, they saw the pumpkins grown by the Indians and pumpkin soon became a staple in their diets. As today, early settlers used them in a wide variety of recipes from desserts to stews and soups. The origin of pumpkin pie is thought to have occurred when the colonists sliced off the pumpkin top, removed the seeds, and then filled it with milk, spices and honey. The pumpkin was then baked in the hot ashes of a dying fire.

References to pumpkins date back many centuries. The name pumpkin originated from the Greek word for "large melon" which is "pepon." "Pepon" was nasalized by the French into "pompon." The English changed "pompon" to "Pumpion." Shakespeare referred to the "pumpion" in his *Merry Wives of Windsor*. American colonists changed "pumpion" into "pumpkin." The "pumpkin" is referred to in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, *Peter, Peter, Pumpkin Eater* and *Cinderella*.

Native Americans dried strips of pumpkin and wove them into mats. They also roasted long strips of pumpkin on the open fire and ate them. The origin of pumpkin pie occurred when the colonists sliced off the pumpkin top, removed the seeds, and filled the insides with milk, spices and honey. The pumpkin was then baked in hot ashes.



Social/cultural uses

What is the role of the farmer? Children will visit a Pumpkin Patch to learn about farming.



Preserving pumpkins

Selecting the Perfect Pumpkin: Selecting the pumpkins you'll carve for your Halloween Jack-O'-Lanterns is very important. You'll need to pick pumpkins according to what you want to carve on them.

Whether it's simply carving a pumpkin to sit on the door step or holding pumpkin carving parties and contests, this age old tradition is a main event for young and old alike.

Depending on the variety, pumpkins can range in size anywhere from tiny to humongous. Medium sized ones work best for most stencils that you'll make or buy. Very large pumpkins can be carved with elaborate designs and used as "center pieces" on your porch or tables. Small pumpkins work fine for carving traditional faces, they can be done fast and you can have many of them scattered about for parties, haunts or up your sidewalk as a lighted pathway.

Help your good-looking pumpkin stay that way

By **TONY KEINATH**

Your child picked a beautiful pumpkin - at least, beautiful to him or her - in the local pumpkin patch. Now what do you do with it until it's time to carve or decorate it?

When carrying pumpkins, do not pick up a fruit by the "handle." Despite the common name for this part of the vine, it is not strong enough to support a 15-pound pumpkin.

Look at the pumpkin carefully: It should have a deep orange color, which indicates that the fruit is mature and ripe.

If the fruit is mottled orange and green, or if it has firm, knobby overgrowths, the plant probably was infected with a plant mosaic virus. The pumpkin is safe to use.

Be careful not to scratch or nick the rind, which is a natural barrier to decay. Molds or soft-rot bacteria will attack the flesh through wounds to the rind. Check for signs of decay on the handle and around the base of it. If the end of the handle is becoming soft, trim it with a sharp knife. To help prevent rot, wipe the fruit with a sponge dipped in a solution of 1 teaspoon chlorine bleach per quart of water.

Allow the fruit to dry, but do not rinse it. A pumpkin should "cure" in a warm, humid place for about 10 days after it is picked. (Often this is done in the pumpkin field or open-air market.) Then store it in a cool (50 to 60 degrees) place with low humidity. Keep the surface of the pumpkin dry during storage.

Once you carve the jack-o'-lantern, place it in the refrigerator during the day when outdoor temperatures rise above 60 degrees, and bring it out in the evening to display.



Pumpkin Carving

To keep the pumpkin fresher longer, wipe out the inside with bleach to retard the growth of mold. If you carve a jack-o-lantern face, rub the edges with petroleum jelly to retard shrinkage.

Advance planning is the key to your pumpkin carving success

First, decide before buying your pumpkins what designs you will be carving into them. This will allow you to create a shopping list or at least a mental idea of the shapes and sizes of pumpkins you'll need.

For standard carving without a stencil, decide if it should be tall and narrow, or more rounded, based on your ideas. Select pumpkins that are uniformly orange meaning that are ripe, have no bruises, cuts or nicks.

If you will be using a stencil to carve your pumpkin, select a pumpkin that is large enough and as close to the same shape as the pattern you're going to carve. It should be as smooth as possible, and free of scratches, dents or gouges.

Never carry a pumpkin by its stem; it may break. If it does break-off you can use toothpicks as a basic patch. Care should be taken not to bruise during transport or storage, as this will shorten their life-span.

If you find a perfect pumpkin but it's missing its stem, have no fear! You can still use it! Just carve the bottom out for the opening the same way you would do the top. Then, you just sit your light source on the cleaned bottom piece and sit the pumpkin over it. Works great and you don't need the stem for a lid handle!



Growing Pumpkin

Pumpkins grow in the field on plants which have long sprawling vines that cover the ground. Pumpkin seeds are planted in the field from the last week of May to the middle of June. After seeds are planted, they will sprout (germinate) in 7 to 10 days, depending on the variety. During this time, seeds need moisture and warmth. Once seeds have germinated, they will send up their first leaves, called seed leaves.

Next, the true leaves will appear. Yellow flowers (blossoms) begin to appear after the first three weeks of growth. Male flowers, which produce pollen, are seen first. About a week later, the female blossoms follow. Female blossoms are easy to spot, because they have tiny pumpkins at their base. Blossoms live for only a half day, and will not open in cold, rainy weather. When both male and female blossoms appear on the vine, bees transfer the pollen from the males to the females. This is called pollination.

Once pollinated, the fruit at the base of the female blossom develops into a full-sized pumpkin. During this time, the plant continues to produce blossoms. The pumpkin contains seeds which can be saved to grow new pumpkins the following year. While growing, pumpkins require a lot of moisture and sunlight. It takes about 90-120 days (depending on the variety) for a pumpkin to grow after it has been planted. Pumpkins are picked in October when they are bright orange in color.

Pumpkins are a good source of nutrition. They are low in calories, fat and sodium and high in fiber. They are loaded with vitamins A and B and potassium. The seeds are very high in protein and are an excellent source of B vitamins and iron.