

Fall is for Pumpkins

What is your favorite thing about fall?

The weather gets cooler, and in northern climates maple trees turn into a beautiful sea of golden orange, red,

and yellow. What a wonderful gift! One of the most colorful sights of autumn is a field of those bright orange squashes we call pumpkins. You'll also find them decorating porches

and doorsteps. In fact, October is the perfect time to take a trip to a pumpkin patch and choose some for cooking and decorating. Read on for some cool facts about pumpkins.



This-um Great German Pumpkin!

Fruit or Vegetable?

Is a pumpkin a fruit or a vegetable? Most people think pumpkins are vegetables because, like many kinds of veggies, they are often cooked, roasted, or boiled. But since a pumpkin has seeds, it is really a fruit! Pumpkins are part of the squash plant family called *Cucurbita pepo*. Other squash family members include fruits such as melons and cucumbers. Pumpkins first came from Central and North America—but now you can find pumpkins all over the world!

What is this?



ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT HOLLADAY

Pumpkins Need Honeybees!

Pumpkins need help from honeybees in order to grow. Honeybees buzz around the pumpkin flowers, collecting pollen on their bodies. As the bees travel from flower to flower, grains of pollen drop from the male pumpkin flower to the inside of the female pumpkin flower. (Yes, pumpkin vines have girl flowers and boy flowers!) This is called pollination. The female flowers must be pollinated in order for pumpkins to grow from the vine. Over time the female flower dies and the fruit of the pumpkin begins to grow. These pumpkins are first green and then turn orange as they grow bigger. After about three to four months of growing on the vine, pumpkins are ready to be picked.



Delicious Pumpkin Dip

What you need:

- 2 cups powdered sugar
- 1 package cream cheese (8 oz)
- 1 cup canned pumpkin puree (also called "solid pack" pumpkin)
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon nutmeg

What to do:

- Combine powdered sugar, cream cheese, pumpkin puree, and spices in a bowl.
- Mix ingredients with a mixer or a wooden spoon until well blended.
- Enjoy this delicious dip with gingersnaps, vanilla wafers, or graham crackers!

FuN Facts

Pumpkins are usually **orange** but are sometimes yellow, green, red, or white.

The **world's heaviest** pumpkin was grown in Mainz, Germany. It weighed 2,096.6 pounds (951 kg)!

Most pumpkins contain **hundreds of seeds**.

Native Americans introduced pumpkins to the Pilgrims who came to North America from England.

The word **pumpkin** comes from the Greek word "pepon", which means "**large melon**."

Pumpkin flowers are **edible**!

How Pumpkins Grow

If you've ever felt the inside of a pumpkin, you know it feels slippery and kind of slimy. The insides of the pumpkin are called fibrous strands. Some people like to call them pumpkin brains! Inside all that goo are the pumpkin seeds. Like any other plant, pumpkins grow from seeds. Once the seed is planted in good soil, it sprouts into a vine. Small yellow flowers begin to grow from the vine. These flowers are the beginning of a new pumpkin!



Power Pumpkins

Pumpkins are packed with things that are good for you. Pumpkins have lots of beta carotene, which gives pumpkins their bright orange color. In your body, beta carotene turns into vitamin A. And vitamin A helps your eyesight stay sharp and clear. It also helps you see better in dim light.

Pumpkin seeds have lots of protein and fiber. Eating a handful of roasted pumpkin seeds will help you feel full longer than other foods. Fiber also helps keep your heart healthy. Even better, pumpkin seeds taste good. So they make a great snack!

Make Your Own Pumpkin

What you need:

- School glue
- 1 roll of toilet paper
- 1 sheet of orange tissue paper
- Green construction paper
- Green pipe cleaners
- Brown construction paper

What to do:

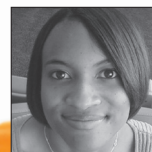
- Cover the roll of toilet paper with the orange tissue paper. First, lay the sheet flat and put the roll in the middle. Lift the tissue paper up around the toilet paper roll and tuck the extra tissue paper down into the roll's hole.
- Take one piece of brown construction paper and roll it the long way to make the pumpkin's stem. Then fold it in half and stick the stem inside the roll's hole.
- Cut leaves out of green paper and tape them inside the roll's hole. Create vines and tendrils using curled pipe cleaners (tendrils are the cool curly parts of the vine).
- If you like, cut black construction paper into shapes for eyes, a nose, and a mouth to make a face. Glue them into place. Put your pumpkin in your bathroom or another place in your house for fall decorations!



Word Fun

How many words can you make from the word *pumpkin*?

Have a contest with your family and write down as many words as you can in the spaces below.



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