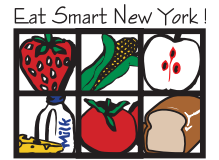




WISE BITES



Winter 2011

Pumpkin: The Underutilized Food

Who doesn't love pumpkins? They are a symbol of fall, whether carved into Jack-o-Lanterns for Halloween or baked into pies at Thanksgiving. Pumpkins however, are far more than fall decorations and pie. They are a nutritious food that can be eaten all year long if you know what to do with it.

They also have a long history in America.



Pumpkin History

Pumpkins are believed to have originated in Central America. Pumpkin is really a squash. It is a member of the Cucurbita family which includes squash and cucumbers and is the fruit of the species *Cucurbita pepo* or *Cucurbita mixta*. Seeds from related plants have been found in Mexico dated to 5500 B.C. Native Americans used pumpkins as a staple in their diets centuries before the settlers arrived. They roasted pumpkin strips over campfires and used them as a food source. Pumpkins helped The Native Americans make it through long cold winters. They used the sweet flesh in numerous ways: roasted, baked, parched, boiled and dried. They ate pumpkin seeds and also used them as a medicine. The blossoms were added to stews. Dried pumpkin could be stored and ground into flour. They dried the shells and used them as bowls and containers to store grain, beans and seeds. They also pounded and dried the pumpkin flesh into strips, and wove the strips into mats which they used for trading purposes.

Archeologists have determined that variations of squash and pumpkins were cultivated along river and creek banks along with sunflowers and beans. This took place long before the emergence of maize (corn). After maize was introduced,

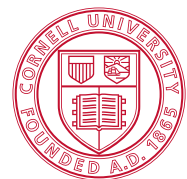
ancient farmers learned to grow squash with maize and beans using the "Three Sisters" tradition.

The Three Sisters are squash, corn and beans which grow and thrive together. Corn serves as the natural trellis for the beans to grow on. The beans roots set nitrogen in the soil to nourish the corn. The bean vines help to stabilize the corn stalks on windy days. The squash plants shelter the shallow roots of the corn and shade the ground to discourage weeds and preserve moisture. This is truly a symbiotic relationship. It was a common practice to bury a small fish alongside the seeds at planting to nourish the "Three Sisters." The early Native American farmers were actually practicing an early form of sustainable agriculture!



Native Americans introduced pumpkins and squashes to the Pilgrims. Pumpkins were an important food source for the pilgrims, as they stored well. It is documented that pumpkins were served at the second Thanksgiving celebration.

Colonists came up with their own way of using pumpkin. They sliced off the pumpkin top, removed the seeds, and filled the insides with milk, spices, eggs, and honey. The pumpkin was then baked in hot ashes, so the pumpkin in this instance was more the crust of the pie than the filling and pumpkin pie as a fall tradition was born.



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The Food Stamp Program provides nutrition assistance to people with low income. It can help you buy nutritious foods for a better diet. To find out more, contact Cornell Cooperative Extension of Rockland County at (845) 429-7085.

Wise Bites is the newsletter of Eat Smart New York in Rockland County. It is published by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Rockland. Eat Smart New York Staff: Lisa Fairbairn, Diane Haltner. Wise Bites Staff: Ann Marie Palefsky, Maribeth Ramos; Editor, Graphic Designer.

Pumpkins Today

Pumpkins presently grow on six out of seven continents with Antarctica being the only pumpkin-free continent. They even grow in Alaska. In the U.S. pumpkins are grown primarily for processing with a small percentage grown for ornamental sales through farms where you pick your own, farmer's markets and retail sales. The traditional American pumpkin is the Connecticut Field Variety, a good all-purpose pumpkin that is suitable for carving as well as eating. The top production states are Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania and California. Around 90-95% of the processed pumpkins in the U.S. are grown in Illinois, making Morton Illinois, the site of the Libby's pumpkin processing plant, the self-proclaimed pumpkin capital of the world, where 85% of the world's pumpkin is processed and canned.

There are many varieties of pumpkins to choose from, some are more suited for eating and others more suited for decoration. Here are the 4 basic types:

Pie Pumpkins (or Sugar Pumpkin, or Sugar Pie Pumpkins)

This variety is the best pumpkin for baking and cooking in all of your favorite recipes. It tends to be smaller than the traditional Jack O'Lantern pumpkin. It has a sweeter taste and a smoother texture than other varieties.



Jack O'Lanterns

While these are good for cooking too, the larger ones get too stringy and have a coarser texture, but can be used for carving or cooking.

For an interesting history of the Jack O'Lantern, check out this link: <http://urbanext.illinois.edu/pumpkins/history.cfm>



Miniatures (Jack B. Littles)

There isn't a lot of "meat" in these pumpkins. A lot of people do not even realize they are edible, let alone think to cook with them. Most uses of the minis are as bowls to hold another recipe or for decorative purposes. But they certainly are edible.



Giant Pumpkins

While these pumpkins are also edible they tend to be coarse and have a less desirable taste. Many of them taste more like squash (their close cousins) than pumpkin. Some people bake them in pies. They are also baked or cooked in recipes that call for squash.



Bear in mind there are many more varieties within each of these categories and many come in a variety of colors as well.

Pumpkin Nutrition Data:

Per 1 cup of pumpkin puree

Calories: 80
Carbohydrates: 19 gram
Fat: less than 1 gram
Protein: 2.4 grams
Cholesterol: 0
Vitamin A 12230 IU: **310% of RDA**
Vitamin C - 11.5 mg **20% of RDA**
Vitamin K - 2.0
Folate - 22 mcg
Sodium 2 mg
Potassium: 588 milligrams
Fiber 10 gm: **47% of RDA**

As you can see from the nutrition data, pumpkins are rich in **Vitamin A** and **potassium**. They are also high in fiber and good sources of **Vitamin C** and provide some **Vitamin K**, and **folate**, as well as being **low** in **calories, fat, cholesterol** and **sodium**. The question then becomes, why not eat pumpkin year round? For one, you may not easily find the canned pumpkin in the "off" seasons of spring and summer. Some stores have none on the shelves, unless you luck out and find it on the discount rack. Another reason is because many people don't know what to do with it besides make it into pie so the demand falls off after the fall and winter holidays. If you search for recipes on the Internet for pumpkin, most of them involve gooey desserts that are high in fat and sugar.

So what can you do with it? Pumpkin can be a base for soups, added to stews and casseroles as well as other baked goods besides pie and even coffee drinks. Any recipe for squash would likely work with pumpkin in its place.

How to cook with fresh pumpkin

There are several ways to prepare fresh pumpkin, if you or your participants want to use them before they disappear again until next fall.

Baking Method

Cut the pumpkin in half and discard the stem section and stringy pulp. Save the seeds to dry and roast. In a shallow baking dish, place the two halves face down and cover with foil. Add water to the bottom of the dish, about ½ cup. Bake in a preheated 375 degrees F (190 degrees C) oven for about 1½ hours for a medium-sized sugar pumpkin, or until tender. Once the baked pumpkin has cooled, scoop out the flesh and puree or mash it. For silky smooth custards or soups, press the pumpkin puree through a sieve.

Steaming Method

Halve the pumpkin; remove seeds, pulp, and stringy portion. Cut into small pieces and peel. Place in a steamer or metal colander which will fit in a covered pot. Put over boiling water, cover, and steam for about 50 minutes, or until tender. Mash pumpkin, then puree in a blender or food processor, or put through a food mill. Use in any recipe calling for pumpkin puree.

Boiling Method

Halve the pumpkin; remove seeds, pulp, and stringy portion. Cut into small pieces and peel. Cover with lightly salted water; boil for about 25 minutes, or until tender. Mash pumpkin, then puree in a blender or food processor or put through a food mill. Use in any recipe calling for pumpkin puree.

Microwave Method

Cut the pumpkin in half, discarding the stringy insides. Microwave the pumpkin on high power for seven minutes per pound. Turn pieces every few minutes to promote even cooking. Process as mentioned above.

You can refrigerate your fresh pumpkin puree for up to three days, or store it in the freezer up to six months, enabling you to enjoy fall pumpkins for months to come. A 5-pound pumpkin will yield about 4 ½ cups of mashed, cooked pumpkin. One can of pumpkin, 15 to 16 ounces, yields about 2 cups of mashed pumpkin.

Here are 2 recipes that showcase pumpkin outside of the (pie) box:

Curried Pumpkin Soup

Ingredients

1/3 cup chopped onion
1 tsp. minced garlic
1 tsp. curry powder
2 tbsps margarine
1 cup pureed pumpkin
1/4 tsp nutmeg
1/8 tsp. sugar
2 cups vegetable or chicken broth
1 ½ cups low fat milk
1 tbsp cornstarch

Optional:

2 tbsps plain low fat yogurt
chopped chives

Instructions:

1. In large pan cook onion, garlic, and curry in the butter or margarine for a few minutes until onion is tender.
2. Add pumpkin, nutmeg, sugar and the bay leaf.
3. Stir in the broth and bring to a boil.
4. Reduce heat and simmer uncovered for about 15 minutes.
5. Take out the bay leaf.
6. Stir in 1 cup of the milk and cook over low heat for a few minutes.
7. In another bowl, stir together the remaining milk and the cornstarch until dissolved, then add it to the pan.
8. Cook and stir until thickened and bubbly.
9. Cook a couple more minutes.

To serve: Swirl the yogurt on top, and garnish with chives. In the freezer it will be good for up to 3 months.

Source: Adapted from a recipe on Laloosh.com



Pumpkin and Spice Yogurt



Ingredients

½ cup canned pumpkin
6 oz vanilla low-fat yogurt
½ tsp pumpkin pie spice

Optional:
low calorie sweetener of choice

Instructions

Blend ingredients together in a small bowl and serve.

*Apple slices or granola make a tasty topping.

Serves: 2

Source: Nutrition Educators of Ulster County



References:

<http://www.allaboutpumpkins.com/history.html>
<http://pumpkinnook.com/facts/nutrition.htm>
<http://urbanext.illinois.edu/pumpkins/history.cfm>
<http://southernfood.about.comod/pumpkins/a/aa100503a.htm>
<http://allrecipes.com/HowTo/baking-with-fresh-pumpkin/detail.aspx>

Pumpkin and Spice Yogurt Nutrition Facts

Serving Size	½ cup	
Servings Per Container	2	
Amount Per Serving		
Calories	61	Calories from Fat 2
Percent of Calories from Fat		3%
		% Daily Value *
Total Fat	0.2 g	0%
Saturated Fat	0.1g	0%
Cholesterol	3mg	1%
Sodium	41 mg	2%
Total Carbohydrate	13 g	4%
Dietary Fiber	1.8g	7%
Sugars	7.5g	
Protein	3.2g	
Vitamin A	195%	Vitamin C 4%
Calcium	9%	Iron 5%

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

	Calories:	2000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Saturated Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

Allergy Information: contains milk

Curried Pumpkin Soup Nutrition Facts

Serving Size	1 cup	
Servings Per Container	4	
Amount Per Serving		
Calories	80	Calories from Fat 27
Percent of Calories from Fat		34%
		% Daily Value *
Total Fat	3g	5%
Saturated Fat	1g	5%
Cholesterol	4mg	1%
Sodium	361 mg	15%
Total Carbohydrate	11.4g	4%
Dietary Fiber	1.5g	6%
Sugars	6.5g	
Protein	3.6g	
Vitamin A	117%	Vitamin C 3%
Calcium	11%	Iron 3%

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

	Calories:	2000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Saturated Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

Allergy Information: contains milk

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