

Preserving Pumpkins
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In October, many people in the United States purchase at least ten pounds of a vegetable that no one in the house intends to eat. What vegetable could that be? Why, the pumpkin, of course! That round, orange squash decorates homes across the country after being carved into various scary, funny and fantastic shapes. But, is it edible?

Certainly! Many home gardeners grow several varieties of squash, including pumpkins for carving and for eating. Perfect pie pumpkins and giant jack-o-lanterns grow all around the world. Most pumpkins show off a beautiful orange skin, but others boast intriguing colors such as white, blue, yellow or red.

Preserving pumpkins can be quite tricky. A low acid food, pumpkin requires pressure canning to be safe. In addition, only cubed pumpkin can be safely pressure canned at home. Never try to can mashed or pureed pumpkin; these must be handled commercially in order to ensure safety during storage. The good news, however, is that pumpkin freezes beautifully. The National Center for Home Food Preservation recommends this method: “Wash, cut into cooking-size sections and remove seeds. Cook until soft in boiling water, in steam, in a pressure cooker, or in an oven. Remove pulp from rind and mash. To cool, place pan containing pumpkin in cold water and stir occasionally (*So Easy to Preserve*, 2006). Pack into rigid containers leaving headspace and freeze.” Use this pumpkin in a pie and never again will a store-bought or canned pumpkin pie grace the table.

Now, the best part of the pumpkin may be the tiny gems found when the shell opens. A one ounce serving of pumpkin seeds contains 158 calories, with 8.57 g of protein and 1.7 g of fiber. It also contains 3.04 g of carbohydrates, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. One favorite way to prepare the seeds, roasting, yields a healthy and handy snack. Simply toss the seeds with salt and/or spices, spread in a single layer on a baking sheet, and roast in the oven at 250°F. The National Center for Home Food Preservation recipe requires 10-15 minutes at this temperature.

Do you have questions about safe home food preservation? Call the Master Food Preservers and leave a message at (530) 621-5506. A Master Food Preserver will return the call. The Master Food Preservers are also available free of charge to speak to organizations and clubs about food safety or food preservation topics. Just call the number above to arrange for a speaker for small or large groups. For more information, be sure to go to the Master Food Preserver website at http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master_Food_Preservers/. Sign up to receive our new Master Food Preservers E-Newsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpnews/>.