



Pumpkins Now and Then

Pumpkins and American History

Native American Indians used pumpkin as an important part of their diets many years before the Pilgrims landed. Native Americans enjoyed the inner pulp of the pumpkin baked, boiled, roasted and dried. They added the blossoms to soups, turned dried pumpkin pieces into rich flour, and ate the seeds as a tasty snack. They also dried strips of pumpkin and wove them into mats. When settlers arrived in America, they saw the pumpkins grown by the Native Americans and pumpkin soon became an important part of their diets, too. 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.



Pumpkins are popular at Halloween when they are carved into Jack-o'-Lanterns. The practice was brought to the United States by Irish immigrants who originally carved turnips into Jack-o'-lanterns. They found the native pumpkin to be larger, easier to carve and the perfect choice for jack-o-lanterns. Burning lumps of coal were originally placed inside a turnip but today we put candles inside of a pumpkin.

The Pumpkin Plant

Pumpkins, squash, cucumbers, gourds, and melons all have similar characteristics and belong to the same family of plants. Each of these plants has creeping vines, big leaves, and flowers that produce fruit. Pumpkins and their relatives are all really a fruit because they have a fleshy part that surrounds their seeds.



Growing Pumpkins

Fields are plowed and planted with pumpkins seeds in spring. After about 2 weeks, small rounded leaves begin to sprout. Pumpkin vine leaves soon appear. These leaves have jagged edges and grow quickly. As the plant grows, long stems twist and curl along the soil. Curly tendrils appear and wrap themselves around other stems to help the vines spread. Flowers begin to bloom and soon tiny green "bulbs" form at the base of the flower. They are the baby pumpkins. With water and sunlight, the little green pumpkins grow bigger and then slowly turn from green to orange. By October, the pumpkins are orange all over and ready to be harvested.



Pumpkin Trivia

- Pumpkin flowers are edible.
- The largest pumpkin pie ever made was over five feet in diameter and weighed over 350 pounds. It used 80 pounds of cooked pumpkin, 36 pounds of sugar, 12 dozen eggs and took six hours to bake.
- 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.
- The largest pumpkin ever grown weighed 1,140 pounds.
- Pumpkins are 90 percent water.
- Pumpkin halves were used as guides for haircuts in colonial times.



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Name: _____



Date: _____

Pumpkins Then and Now - Reading Passage

Directions: Read each question and fill in the best answer

1. Native Americans did which of the following with their pumpkins?

- A. made flour
- B. used them as bowls
- C. ate them as a snack
- D. all of the above

2. Pumpkin pie was most likely first made by

- A. Native Americans.
- B. the Colonists.
- C. the Irish immigrants.
- D. Jack Lantern.

3. The first pumpkin "pie" was made by cutting off the top, removing the seeds and fibers and filling the pumpkin with

- A. water.
- B. sugar.
- C. milk.
- D. flour.

4. Pumpkin plants

- A. have jagged leaves.
- B. have tendrils.
- C. do not make fruit.
- D. smell good.

Extended Response

Early American settlers began the tradition of making pumpkin pie. Describe some other traditions we celebrate in today's society. Be sure to include your own experiences in your explanation.

Pumpkin Detectives...Main Ideas



Now that you have read about pumpkins can you become a **Pumpkin Detective** and learn even more? Read each of the paragraphs below that contain lots of **DETAILS** about pumpkins. Think about what you read. Then, using your best detective skills fill in a title for each paragraph which accurately describes the **MAIN IDEA** of the paragraph.

Over the years, pumpkins have had a variety of uses. The Native Americans added pumpkin pieces to their stews and fed chunks of raw pumpkins to their horses. Native Americans used pumpkin seeds as food and medicine.



Today, pumpkin is canned to be used as pumpkin pie filling and for baking. Some pumpkins are used to feed livestock. Other pumpkins are easy to carve so they are sold to become *Jack-o-Lanterns*. Now in October, there are pumpkin throwing contests called *Punkin' Chunkin' Contests*. Teams construct and use a variety of launching devices such as catapults, machines, and cannons to hurl pumpkins through the air. Usually white pumpkins are used because they have thicker rinds which can better hold up when hurled. Landing spots are marked with a small flag. Do you ever wonder what other uses there will be for pumpkins?

Main Idea: _____



Different varieties of pumpkins have different names. Sometimes you can tell a lot about a pumpkin just from its name. Names like Atlantic Giant, Big Max, and Mammoth Gold tell you something about their size. What do the names Baby Boo, Munchkin, and Small Sugar tell you about these pumpkin varieties? Some pumpkin varieties just have some funny names such as Funny Face, Spook-tacular, Happy Jack, and Cinderella. Whatever the name and variety of pumpkin, they are a very special fruit!

Main Idea: _____



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Try this...

Pumpkin Pie for One

Learn about measuring carefully and following directions as you make a special treat!

Materials and ingredients per student:

- ❖ One small zip lock freezer bag
- ❖ One 8 ounce plastic tumbler
- ❖ One plastic spoon
- ❖ 3 Graham crackers
- ❖ 2 teaspoons of sugar
- ❖ $\frac{3}{4}$ tablespoon of squeeze margarine
- ❖ 1 tablespoon of INSTANT vanilla pudding
- ❖ $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of pumpkin pie spice
- ❖ 1 tablespoon of canned pumpkin
- ❖ $\frac{1}{3}$ cup of cold milk
- ❖ 1 tablespoon of whipped topping



How can you tell the difference between a pumpkin and a squash?

(see below for the answer)



Directions:

1. In plastic zipper bag gently crush 3 graham crackers. Add 2 teaspoons of sugar and $\frac{3}{4}$ tablespoons of squeeze margarine.
2. Mix these ingredients and spread in the bottom of the plastic cup to form a "pie shell".
3. In the same plastic bag, combine the 1 tablespoon of instant vanilla pudding, $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of pumpkin pie spice, 3 teaspoons of pumpkin, and $\frac{1}{3}$ cup of cold milk. Mix well for 2-3 minutes until blended. Cut a corner of the plastic bag and squeeze the filling into the "pie shell". Top with whipped topping.
4. Eat and enjoy!



The squash has a round stem leading into the fruit.
Pumpkin stems are shaped like hexagons or octagons.



Check Out These Books



The Pumpkin Book by Gail Gibbons

Describes how pumpkins come in different sizes and shapes, how they grow and their traditional uses and cultural significance.

Pumpkins by Jacqueline Farmer

Learn all about the pumpkin, from its history (dating back 11,000 years) to its growth (up to 1,300 pounds) to its place in ancient lore ("jack-o'-lantern" comes from an Irish legend).

Pumpkin Circle: The Story of a Garden by George Levenson

Beautiful photographs tell the complete life cycle of a pumpkin from planting to harvest.



Pumpkins by Ken Robbins

Striking photographs show the lifespan of a pumpkin from a tiny seed to a blooming vine, then a small gourd, and finally, a carved jack-o'-lantern lighting up a dark Halloween night.



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