



Extension News Column

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It has been a tough year for pumpkin lovers. Because of a failure of the pumpkin crop, we were unable to get canned pumpkin at any cost for most of this year.

The year's harvest promises to be much more plentiful and pumpkin is readily available in the store, both fresh and canned.

Those of us who are frugal are looking for a good way to get our pumpkin pies for Thanksgiving at a lower price. That Halloween jack o lantern may be just the way to get your pumpkin at a lower price.

Granted, the Halloween jack o lanterns are of the giant variety and may not have as much flavor or color as the sweet little pie pumpkins. But it is possible to use it for pies and other baked goods. Pie pumpkins are smaller, sweeter, less grainy textured pumpkins than the usual jack-o-lantern types.

After your Jack o lantern has been used, scrape out all the black and wax from the candles from the inside. If the pumpkin is badly burned, it may give a burned flavor and you may not want to use it.

These preparation directions will work for either a fresh pumpkin or the recycled jack o lantern.

There are several ways to cook the pumpkin, just choose use your preferred method. It can be microwaved, steamed, or baked in the oven.

Microwave- Remove the stem, and put the pumpkin into a microwaveable bowl. You may need to cut the pumpkin further to make it fit. The fewer the number of pieces, the easier it will to scoop out the cooked pumpkin afterwards. Put a couple of inches of water in the bowl, cover it, and put in the microwave. Microwave on high for 15 minutes or until soft.

Stovetop--On the stovetop, use a steamer basket in your favorite stockpot and cook for about 20 to 30 minutes.

Oven- You can also bake the prepared pumpkin in the oven. Just put the prepared pumpkin in an ovenproof container (with a lid), and pop it in the oven at 350 F. It normally takes about 45 minutes to an hour and a half; just test it periodically by sticking it with a fork to see if it is soft.

Pressure cooker – Place the rack in the bottom of the pressure cooker. Add enough water to just touch the bottom of the rack that you will place the pumpkin on. Add the pumpkin, put the lid and turn the heat on high. Once it comes up to pressure, cooking time should only be about 10 minutes, and the pumpkin should literally fall out of its skin.

Whether you cook the pumpkin on the stove, pressure cooker, microwave, or even the oven, once it is cooked until it is soft, it is easy to scoop out the pulp with a broad, smooth spoon, such as a tablespoon. Use the spoon to gently lift and scoop the cooked pumpkin out of the skin. It should separate easily and in fairly large chunks, if the pumpkin is cooked enough.

Puree the pumpkin by mashing it with a potato masher, using a food mill, or even using an immersion blender.

If your pumpkin puree seems watery, you may want to let it sit for 30 minutes and then pour off any free water. Or strain the puree through a fine strainer, or use a paper coffee filter placed in a colander for straining. The pumpkin is now cooked and ready for the pie recipe.

You can freeze the puree to use it later! Just use a freezer bag or other container and exclude as much air as possible. It should last a year in a freezer. It isn't safe to can the product, the puree is too thick to safely can. If you want to can it, can cubes of cooked pumpkin. Call the office at 474-2420 for instructions on canning pumpkin. WE also have a great publication on toasting your pumpkin seeds.

Enjoy your pumpkin in your favorite pumpkin recipe.