



10 Uses for Your Pumpkin

Mary Mazzoni Nov 3, 2020

Feature image courtesy of Wayne Marshall.

Now that another Halloween has come and gone, what will you do with all those carved-up jack-o-lanterns and festive centerpieces? You've already shelled out the cash, love, and labor for your pumpkin, so there's no reason to throw it out when creative uses abound.

Because the pumpkin is tasty, many of these tips involve food. But keep in mind that these food applications are best used for uncarved pumpkins. Once a pumpkin has been carved and has sat out for more than 24 hours, it could be unsafe to eat.

But don't despair, dear pumpkin lover. Here are a variety of tips for using your pumpkin, including some for your spooky carvings.

1. Whip up some pumpkin purée

Pumpkin purée is the number one use for the fleshy insides of your pumpkin, and it's super easy to make. Start by cutting your pumpkin down the middle. Scoop out the seeds and guts and set them aside for later.

Place your pumpkin cut-side down in a baking dish with about a cup of water and bake for about 90 minutes or until the flesh is tender. Then, simply scoop out the flesh and puree it in a food processor.

Once you've made your pumpkin purée, it's ready for use in all your favorite pumpkin recipes, from pies to pancakes to soups. Any extra can be stored in the freezer for several months, which means you can ditch all that canned pumpkin when Thanksgiving comes around.



Use your puree to make some warming pumpkin soup. Photo: Valeria Boltneva from Pexels

2. Make a pumpkin planter

This is a great use for a carved or uncarved pumpkin. Head down to your local nursery, pick up some annuals, and use your pumpkin as the planter! It will be a festive decoration for a few days, and then you can plant the whole thing right in the backyard. The pumpkin will naturally compost and provide fertilizer for your plants.

If your pumpkin is uncarved, cut off the top and remove the seeds, guts, and flesh from inside. Set them aside and save for later (if you have a carved pumpkin, skip this step). Simply pack some potting soil into your pumpkin until it is about one-third full. You may need to do some extra packing to keep the soil from falling out of your jack-o-lantern's face. Place your plant into the pumpkin and fill it out with more potting soil.

You can dig a small hole and plant the whole thing right away or leave it on the porch for a few days for decoration. Depending on where you call home, it may be a little chilly for planting. But if you haven't seen your first frost, give this one a whirl.

3. Use those guts

The guts are the stringy pieces that surround the seeds of your pumpkin, and they can be one of the most difficult parts to use. We suggest using these icky innards to make some pumpkin stock.

Separate the seeds from the guts and set them aside for a tasty snack later. Place your guts in a pot filled with water and boil. You can add other unwanted vegetable pieces, such as celery tips or carrot tops, to add more flavor. Boil for about 30 minutes, or until the water begins to change color. Strain your stock, reserving the broth and setting your guts and vegetable pieces aside to be composted.

Pumpkin stock is perfect for adding flavor to soups or casseroles, and you can freeze any extra for later use.



Use the pumpkin innards to flavor casseroles. Photo: Kelly Sikkema on Unsplash

4. Get pumpkin pretty

Pumpkins are rich in zinc and vitamins A, C, and E, which makes pumpkin purée healthy for your body if you eat it *and* healthy to apply to the skin. That's why one of the prettiest uses for the pumpkin is for a [DIY face mask](#).

Start with about five teaspoons of pumpkin purée, add three teaspoons of brown sugar — which will naturally exfoliate your skin — and a tiny splash of milk.

Mix it all together, and apply to your face in circular motions, avoiding the eye area. Relax for up to 20 minutes and allow all that pumpkin goodness to seep into your skin. Bonus: It smells yummy!

5. Create a classic pumpkin seed dish

Roasted pumpkin seeds are a tasty fall favorite, and there are plenty of ways to use them this November. After you've separated the seeds from the guts and rinsed them thoroughly, place them in a single layer on an oiled baking sheet. Stir them around to coat them with oil.

From here, you can go almost anywhere with your pumpkin seeds. Add a little salt for classic roasted pumpkin seeds or add some brown sugar and cinnamon for a sweeter treat. Roasted pumpkin seeds also make a tasty and crunchy outer layer for your candied apples, and they go great in brownies and other baked goods. But if Halloween has left you with a sugar crash, your roasted pumpkin seeds will make delicious garnishes for salads, too.

6. Feed the wildlife

Depending on where you live, a pumpkin you'd otherwise throw away could be a tasty snack for a furry or feathery neighbor. Old jack-o-lanterns are perfect food for deer, and any pumpkin seeds you don't want to toast up for yourself will make a yummy treat for birds.

Cut good ol' Jack into fourths and place the pieces in your yard, away from your house. Soon you'll notice some Bambi look-a-likes having a tasty afternoon snack. Place unwanted pumpkin seeds in your birdfeeder or the container of your choice and do some bird-watching while you have your morning coffee.



Roast and season the seeds for yourself or set them out raw for the wildlife to enjoy.

Photo: Engin Akyurt on Unsplash

7. Make a post-Halloween treat

The trick-or-treaters have left the building, but the candy doesn't have to. Pumpkin candy is a Mexican tradition, but when you discover just how tasty they are, you'll likely make it one of yours, too.

Start with a whole pumpkin and cut it in half. After you've removed the guts and seeds, cut the pumpkin into smaller chunks and carefully remove the skin with a sharp vegetable peeler.

Once the skin has been removed, cut your pumpkin into bite-sized pieces and place the pieces into a saucepan. Add just enough water to cover them, cover the pot, and bring to a boil.

After the pumpkin begins to soften, stir in one cup of brown sugar and desired spices. We suggest a little cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, and cloves. Cover with lid and continue to boil until the sugar forms a syrup.

Allow the candies to sit in the syrup overnight to soak in the sugary flavor, and then place on a wire rack to dry. Sprinkle with additional sugar if desired.

8. Mix up a pumpkin cocktail

Thanks to the ever-widening selection of flavored vodkas on the market, you can make a tasty cocktail out of almost anything — even your Halloween pumpkin. For a tasty cocktail, fill a shaker with ice, and add a tablespoon of pumpkin purée and two ounces of the flavored vodka of your choice. We suggest vanilla, cinnamon, or ginger. Add a splash of lime juice and a tiny squeeze of honey. Shake and strain into a glass over fresh ice.

While you enjoy your grown-up dessert drink, you can use some of that pumpkin purée in a tasty milkshake for the kids. Combine two scoops of vanilla ice cream, a half-cup of milk, three tablespoons of pumpkin purée, and a teaspoon of cinnamon in a blender. It tastes so much like pumpkin pie in a glass that you may even steal a little for yourself.

9. Spice up a dinner party with pumpkin serving bowls

Instead of hitting the trash can, those pumpkin shells could be hitting the dinner table and impressing your guests. Turning your pumpkin shells into festive serving bowls is easy.

Simply place your hollowed-out pumpkin on a baking sheet lined with aluminum foil. Brush the insides and the tops with a little vegetable oil, and season as desired. Bake at 350 degrees for 35 minutes, and these babies are ready to serve your favorite soups or dips. They'll be great conversation-starters, and you can [toss them into the compost pile](#) after dinner is over.

10. Have pumpkin butter with breakfast

Fruit butters are delectable additions to a fall breakfast, and pumpkin butter is one of the easiest to make. Simply place two cups of your pumpkin purée into a saucepan with a cup of brown sugar and a cup of water or apple cider. From there you can add whatever spices you choose. We suggest familiar pumpkin pie spices such as cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, and ginger, along with a pinch of salt.

Stir all the ingredients together and bring to a boil. Turn down the heat and allow the mixture to simmer for about 25 minutes. Once your pumpkin butter has cooled, store it in a glass jar in the refrigerator and use it for breakfast on toast or biscuits. It makes a great topping for pancakes and oatmeal, too.