



Using, Storing and Preserving Pumpkins



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Michigan-grown pumpkins are available between August and November.

Recommended varieties

The best pumpkin to use for cooking and baking is one of the smaller, sweet varieties known as pie pumpkins, such as Peek-a-Boo, Sugar Treat, Dickinson Fields, Baby Pam, Triple Treat, Kentucky Field, Buckskin and Chelsey. These types are a good choice for cooking because they are meatier and contain less stringy fiber than carving pumpkins.

Yield

1 quart	=	2¼ pounds
9 pints	=	10 pounds
7 quarts	=	16 pounds
1 medium pumpkin (5 pounds)	=	4½ cups cooked

Storage and food safety

- Select a heavy, unblemished pumpkin that is free of cracks and soft spots and has deep orange color.
- Wash thoroughly under running water. Do not use soap.
- Do not store in the refrigerator or in a damp place. Moisture causes rapid deterioration.
- If stored properly, a whole, unblemished pumpkin can be stored for three to six months at 45 degrees to 50 degrees F.
- For best quality and nutritive value, preserve no more than your family can consume in 12 months.

How to preserve

Freezing

Freezing is the easiest method to preserve pumpkin and will result in a quality product later on. Begin with a full-colored, mature pumpkin with fine texture (avoid



stringy or dry meat). Place the pumpkin on newspaper and insert the tip of a long knife to cut it, or break it open by cracking on a hard surface. Scoop out the contents and discard. (You may wish to save the seeds for roasting.) Wash the pumpkin and cut into cooking-size sections. The sections may be cooked with the skin on or off. Peeling a raw pumpkin can be difficult; it is usually easier to remove the skin once the pumpkin has been cooked.

Pumpkin may be cooked in boiling water or steam, in a pressure cooker, or in an oven or microwave. Test for doneness by piercing with a fork. If it was cooked unpeeled, remove the soft pulp from the rind and mash. To cool, place the pan containing pumpkin in cold water and stir occasionally. Pack into rigid containers leaving ½ inch headspace, label, date and freeze.

Canning

Home canning is **not** recommended for pumpkin butter or any mashed or pureed pumpkin or winter squash. The only directions for canning pumpkin and winter squash are for cubed flesh.

Canning cubed pumpkin: Only pressure canning methods are recommended for canning cubed pumpkin. Wash, remove seeds, cut into 1-inch-wide slices, and peel. Cut flesh into 1-inch cubes. Boil 2 minutes in water. **Caution: Do not mash or puree.** Fill jars with cubes and cover with cooking liquid, leaving 1 inch headspace. Wipe jar rims, adjust lids and process in a pressure canner. (See chart on next page for process time).

For pumpkin for making pies, drain jars and strain or sieve cubes.

Drying pumpkin and pumpkin seeds

Wash, peel and remove fibers and seeds from pumpkin (or Hubbard squash) flesh. Cut flesh into small, thin strips no more

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Recommended process time for pumpkin and winter squash in a dial-gauge pressure canner.

Style of pack	Jar size	Process time (min.)	Canner pressure (PSI) at altitudes of			
			0 - 2,000 ft	2,001 - 4,000 ft	4,001 - 6,000 ft	6,001 - 8,000 ft
Hot	Pints	55	11	12	13	14
	Quarts	90	11	12	13	14

Recommended process time for pumpkin and winter squash in a weighted-gauge pressure canner.

Style of pack	Jar size	Process time (min.)	Canner pressure (PSI) at altitudes of	
			0-1,000 ft	Above 1,000 ft
Hot	Pints	55	10	15
	Quarts	90	10	15

than 1 inch wide by 1/8 inch thick. Blanch strips over steam for 3 minutes and dip briefly in cold water to stop the blanching process. It is not necessary to cool to room temperature before drying. Drain excess moisture. Dry the strips in an electric dehydrator until brittle.

Pumpkin also makes excellent dried vegetable leather. Puree cooked pumpkin and strain. Add honey and spices, and dry in a home food dehydrator.

Drying seeds and roasting seeds are different processes. To dry, wash pumpkin seeds, removing fibrous pumpkin tissue. Then dry seeds in the sun, in an electric dehydrator at 115 degrees to 120 degrees F for 1 to 2 hours, or in an oven on a very low, warm temperature only for 3 to 4 hours. Stir frequently to avoid scorching. Dried seeds need to be stored in a moisture-free environment.

To roast seeds, take the dried seeds, toss with oil and/or salt, and roast in a preheated oven at 250 degrees F for 10 to 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Store in an airtight container.

Pickling pumpkin

Pumpkin can be used in pickled recipes such as salsas, chutneys and relishes, but the recipes must be treated as fresh prepared foods and kept refrigerated. There are currently no tested recipes or procedures for safely canning these types of products by either the boiling water or pressure canning method.

Pumpkin preserves

Gelled preserves rely on the natural acidity present in most fruits for safe food preservation. Most fruits have natural acids, so resulting jams or jellies can be safely canned in a boiling water bath process. Pumpkin, however, is a low-acid vegetable and cannot be safely canned in the boiling water process. A jam or sweetened preserve would have to have enough sugar and/or added acid to be treated safely without concerns about botulism. A certain acidity level is also required to cause the pectin molecule to form a gel structure. The USDA does not have any tested recipes to recommend for safely canning pumpkin preserves (jams, jellies, conserves or pumpkin butter) and storing them at room temperature. These products must be stored in the refrigerator or freezer and treated the same as fresh pumpkin.

Sources

Complete Guide to Home Canning. 2009. Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 539. United States Department of Agriculture.

Andress, Elizabeth and Judy A. Harrison. *So Easy to Preserve*. Bulletin 989, 6th Edition. Cooperative Extension University of Georgia, 2014.

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