

October's Try-Day Friday Food is

THE PUMPKIN



Preparing Young Children
for Lifelong Success

What is it? The pumpkin is an orange, hard-skinned winter squash that can grow very large, and is one of the oldest crops grown for food, dating back thousands of years in Mexico. The pumpkin probably needs no introduction, as it is a common sight in the autumn, and especially around Halloween. Pumpkin is one of the most popular crops in the United States, with more than 1.5 billion pounds grown annually. Most of those pumpkins are processed and canned, or put out on display, such as with carved jack-o-lanterns. Pumpkins are a versatile food though, and were an important one in America's past, as they are easy to grow and keep well when stored properly. Pumpkin pie is an American staple, and pumpkin flavor and pumpkin spice products are very common in the fall each year, but the pumpkin can be utilized in many more delicious and nutritious ways.



Where do I find it? When looking for a good eating pumpkin, visit one of Wichita's farmers' markets or pumpkin patches. Grocery store pumpkins may contain high levels of pesticides, and are typically varieties that make good jack-o-lanterns, but poor cuisine. A quick online search for "Wichita Pumpkin Patch" will field results for five options in Wichita, Haysville, Clearwater, and Andover, and one more in El Dorado. A quicker and easier way to add pumpkin to your diet is to use canned pumpkin, which will be available at most grocery stores.

How do I choose it? There are two basic distinct types of culinary pumpkin; pie pumpkins, which are small and dense inside, and which will yield more flesh by weight for canning or pies, and common, larger pumpkins, which are the type used for carving. If looking for a large pumpkin to bake in the oven, don't get carried away, or your gourd may not fit in the oven! Pumpkins can grow enormous, but an ideal cooking pumpkin will have a thick rind and sit evenly, with no rocking. Look for a stem that can make a good handle, just as you would for a pumpkin to carve.

How do I use it? Pie pumpkins are cut in half, laid on a baking sheet and baked until the flesh is soft and easily pureed. They are commonly used for pies, hence their name. A large pumpkin, when hollowed out makes a creative and stylish cooking pot, for soup, chili, a risotto or other rice dish. Medium sized pumpkins with their tops cut off and the insides cleaned out can make clever individual serving bowls. The flesh of the pumpkin scrapes off easily when cooked, and can be added to the dish in the gourd. Larger common pumpkins will also yield seeds, which can be roasted with a variety of spices, sweet, spicy, or both.

Healthy Pumpkin Recipes

Try these two tasty, healthy recipes to experience pumpkin at its best. Consider saving the pumpkin seeds when making the chili, or when carving jack-o-lanterns this year to season and roast. Pumpkin seeds contain significant amounts of many important minerals, such as zinc, copper, and manganese, as well as protein.

Four Bean Pumpkin Chili (Serves 4-6)

This colorful chili offers a bright mix of colors, flavors, and even sizes, with big white butter beans, and chunks of several types of vegetables. Nutritionally, it is high in protein, iron, and vitamins A and C. It is fun for the whole family or a dinner party.

Ingredients:

1 large common pumpkin
1 Can each of Black, Kidney, Pinto, and Butter Beans (look for low-sodium varieties)
1 Lb. Golden Corn Kernels (consider shucking them fresh!)
2 Lbs. Tomatoes, 1 green bell pepper, 1 Yellow Onion, 2 Anaheim Chili peppers (or spicier variety)
1 clove garlic, several sprigs of fresh cilantro leaves, 2 bay leaves, and oregano to taste

Optional Additions:

Shredded cheddar cheese, and roasted pumpkin seeds make good toppings or garnish. If you eat meat, turkey, chicken, beef, or pork will all go well with this chili.

Instructions:

1. Cut a wide lid into the pumpkin. Remove all the stringy guts and the seeds from the pumpkin. Scrape the sides lightly until the sides are clean and smooth.
2. Bake your pumpkin in the oven for 30 minutes at 350 F on a baking sheet. The baking sheet will catch any juices that leak out and save you a mess!
3. Dice all vegetables, drain beans. If using meat, sauté it thoroughly with the onions and a little oil before adding beans and other vegetables. Simmer all ingredients in a pot for at least 15 minutes to start flavors mingling.
4. Remove pumpkin from the oven and ladle, or carefully pour, the chili into the pumpkin. Return into the oven for another 45 minutes. Be careful here, as the filled pumpkin will be heavy!
5. Remove the pumpkin from the oven. Put on the lid and let it rest for 15 minutes. Serve the chili from the pumpkin, and scrape the sides into the chili as you serve.

How to include the kids?

Go to a pumpkin patch together and let the kids help pick out the pumpkin. Let them help clean out the gourd, and separate seeds to rinse, dry, and then roast- either later, or in a separate toaster oven for this recipe.

Pumpkin Waffles

(Makes 4 large or 8 small waffles)

These waffles are so sweet, moist, and flavorful that you may not even reach for maple syrup. Made with whole-wheat flour, whole milk, and eggs, they will be filling too, while providing high levels of anti-oxidants (from the spices), protein, B vitamins, and vitamin A and C.

Ingredients:

½ C coconut oil, or butter
1/3 C brown sugar
1 (15 oz) can pumpkin puree
2 eggs (separated)
½ C whole milk
1 tsp Vanilla
1 tsp Cinnamon, ½ tsp nutmeg, ½ tsp cloves
1.5 C whole wheat flour
1 Tbsp. + 1 tsp. baking powder
½ tsp. Salt

Optional add in: ½ C black walnuts or pecans

Instructions:

1. Preheat your waffle iron according to instructions.
2. In a large bowl, whisk the melted coconut oil or butter, the sugar, pumpkin puree, egg yolks, and milk together until smooth.
3. Add the spices and Vanilla. Stir.
4. In a separate bowl, mix the flour, baking powder, and salt together.
5. Stir the flour mixture into the wet pumpkin mixture.
6. In another separate bowl, or an electric mixer, whisk the egg whites until they are white and fluffy with soft peaks.
7. Gently fold the egg whites into the batter.
8. Scoop batter into the waffle iron and cook.

How to include the kids?

Let your little ones help to mix all the ingredients, or flip the electric mixer on and off. If you are using pecans or black walnuts, consider harvesting some as a family. Both nuts are common to Wichita, and you, or a neighbor, may have a tree with nuts that normally go to waste. There are blogs that give step-by-step instructions. Harvesting and processing nuts can give a new appreciation for how much work pioneers and Native Americans put into eating before the days of grocery stores!