

## IFAS Extension

Get Your Beta-Carotene In A Pumpkin Pie Or Custard

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If you plan to eat your Halloween Jack-o-lantern create it with colored markers or nontoxic paints then it can be turned into a nutritious, economical dish. Select a small, heavy pumpkin as it contains more pulp than the larger varieties. The sugar or pie pumpkins are the best for eating. The shell should have no cracks, bruises, or decay. High quality pumpkins are mature and firm, with a rich orange color. The bright orange color is a dead giveaway it's loaded with an important antioxidant, beta-carotene. Beta-carotene is one of the plant carotenoids that when converted to vitamin A in the body performs many important functions in overall health.

We know that beta-carotene promotes eye health, but current research indicates that a diet rich in foods containing beta-carotene may reduce the risk of developing certain types of cancer and may offer protection against heart disease and other diseases, including some degenerative aspects of aging.

One-half cup of cooked pumpkin contains only about 25 calories and contains no fat, cholesterol or sodium. Cooking pumpkin appears to help release the beta-carotene making it easier for the body to absorb.

The University of Missouri - Extension suggests a simple method for cooking small jack-o-lanterns. Carefully scrub your pumpkin. Pierce the small pumpkin several times with a sharp knife to prevent possible explosions and bake it whole on a tray in a 325°F oven until the pumpkin pierces easily. The length of baking time depends on the size of the pumpkin, but count on about one hour. Halve larger pumpkins and bake, cut sides down. When cool, quarter pumpkins and peel off the outer skin. It should come off easily like the skin from a baked potato. If it doesn't, bake a little longer. Scoop out the seeds and stringy membrane. Keep the seeds for roasting. Mash or puree the pumpkin pulp and chill it immediately. The pulp puree should be frozen or used within 36 hours.

Roasted pumpkin seeds make a terrific high energy snack. To roast the seeds: wash off strings and blot seeds dry. Toss with a small amount of vegetable oil, spread in a single layer on a shallow baking sheet and bake at 250°F for 10 - 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. A sprinkle of salt or another seasoning, such as curry, is optional.

If you are short on time, use your microwave oven to bake the pumpkin. Check your manufacturer's directions. You can also cook pumpkins in boiling water, however, baking usually yields more pulp.

In addition to the traditional pie, pumpkin puree can be used as a substitute for winter squash in most recipes. It can be turned into a quick, nutritious soup, by heating 2 1/2 cups pumpkin, 1 can broth, 1/2 cup skim milk, and 1 teaspoon mild curry powder together. Top with a spoon of fat-free sour cream.

What about that seasonal favorite, the pumpkin pie? Try your recipe, using skimmed evaporated milk and egg whites in place of whole eggs and whole milk to cut down on fat and calorie

content. Or make a custard without the crust to save time, fat, and calories. The following recipe is courtesy of aboutproduce.com.

### Pumpkin Custard

1 1/2 cup pumpkin puree  
1/4 cup apple juice  
3 egg whites, slightly beaten  
1 can (12 ounces) evaporated skim milk, scalded  
1 tablespoon pumpkin pie spice  
1/4 cup brown sugar

Combine all ingredients in mixing bowl and stir thoroughly. Pour into 9 inch glass pie plate, sprayed with nonstick cooking spray. Sprinkle with brown sugar. Bake for 35 to 45 minutes in a preheated 400°F oven or until a knife inserted near the center come out clean. Makes 6 servings. Refrigerate immediately.

*Nutrition Information: 116 calories; 0g fat; 2mg cholesterol; 1 g fiber; 98 mg sodium*

All homemade pumpkin pies as well as custards and pies should not be kept at room temperature for more than 2 hours.

If you have a question, write to Jo Shuford-Law, Extension Agent Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Florida/IFAS Extension—Leon County, 615 Paul Russell Road, Tallahassee, FL 32301-7099; or call the Extension Office 487-3006, between 8 a.m. to noon or 1 to 5 p.m. weekdays.

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