

Ask Cynthia Brian-Pumpkins

Reader's Request

Hi Cynthia:

We grew pumpkins as project with the kids this year yet we aren't sure about harvesting or what to do with them besides carving them for Halloween? I hate to waste and figured you'd have some ideas.

Thanks,
Angela

Hi Angela:

Bravo to you for getting your children involved in growing! They will learn so much and the fact that they have grown their own pumpkins will give them pride and boasting rights. You have come to the right person for suggestion, as, like you, I am a waste not person.



Carved pumpkins

Photos Cynthia Brian

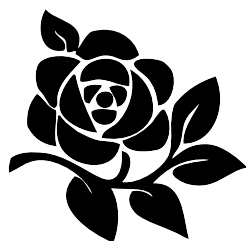
To harvest, thump the melon, it should sound hollow and have a tough skin. Try to put your fingernail in the rind. When pumpkins are ripe, it is difficult to pierce them. Cut the pumpkins from the vine with pruning shears or a sharp knife. Don't twist them off or they'll rot more quickly. Cure in the sun to harden for at least a week. They are now ready for display, carving, and eating.

Besides using them for jack-o-lanterns and pumpkin pie, the noble pumpkin (from the Greek work "pepon," or large melon) are a major health food fruit, packed with large amounts of vitamins A, C, and potassium. A full cup is only about 30 calories. Cut out the flesh and cook like squash, or make soups, cakes, bread, pancakes, or even a pumpkin pizza.

After harvesting, here are other ideas to consider:

1. Before carving your pumpkin, scoop out the seeds. Roast them on a cookie sheet with a dash of olive oil and garlic salt for a nutritious, crunchy snack.
2. Or dry the seeds, store them in a brown bag to plant next May in a sunny location. With plenty of water and fertilizer you'll be able to boast your own pumpkin patch in 75-100 days from planting. Now your kids will be really excited.
3. Spray paint the extra pumpkins bronze, gold, silver, or whatever colors you are using for your Thanksgiving or Christmas décor. I add natural foliage such as dried corn stalks and reeds for the November holiday, and evergreens and ornaments for the December season. My porch sparkles. You can even paint them one color for Thanksgiving and another for Christmas. Pumpkins, if kept dry, will last three months or more. Store your extra produce in a cool, dark place to enjoy all winter for projects and recipes.
4. Instead of carving your pumpkin, draw, paint, or use decals to make creative faces. In this way, after Halloween, you can cut up the pumpkin and enjoy the delicious flesh inside.
5. Once you have carved a pumpkin and put it outside as a decoration, don't attempt to salvage it for human consumption. However, pumpkins are great snacks for chickens, ducks, geese, goats, and other barnyard animals. Find friends with critters before you discard. Even the squirrels and birds love them.

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