Pumpkins: More Than Just Jack-O-Lanterns

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Ask an Expert - Pumpkins: More than Just Jack-o-lanterns

Fall is in full swing, and pumpkins are everywhere. Pumpkin can be used for so much more than just carving, crafts or cookies. There are many ways to prepare it, and many people aren’t aware of the health benefits, which are an added bonus!

Pumpkin is low in calories. One-half cup of mashed pumpkin (without salt) has 24 calories, 0 grams (g) fat, 1 g protein, 6 g carbohydrate, 1 g fiber and 1 milligram sodium. Pumpkins are packed with nutrients, such as fiber and beta carotene. Our bodies use beta carotene to produce vitamin A. Pumpkins are also rich in potassium. You can steam a pumpkin, bake it, boil it, microwave it (if you put slits in it) and pressure cook it. Once cooked it can be mashed, pureed, cubed and stored in either the fridge or freezer in air-tight containers. There are many options for mashed or pureed pumpkin (either fresh or canned). Some include: muffins, biscuits, quick breads, soups and sauce for mac and cheese or other pastas. It can also be added to chili, smoothies, cheese balls and hummus. Cubed and cooked pumpkin can be used with pasta, risotto, soups, salads and casseroles. Try these savory pumpkin recipes to get a delicious taste of fall.

Pumpkin Chili (From Taste of Home)

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 medium sweet yellow pepper, chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 cans (15 ounces each) black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 3/4 cup fresh steamed, mashed pumpkin; or use 1 can of 15 ounces, solid-pack pumpkin
- 1 can (14-1/2 ounces) diced tomatoes, undrained
- 3 cups chicken broth
- 2-1/2 cups cubed cooked turkey or chicken, or cooked ground beef
- 2 teaspoons dried parsley flakes
- 2 teaspoons chili powder
- 1-1/2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 1-1/2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

In a large skillet, heat oil over medium-high heat. Add onion and pepper; cook and stir until tender. Add garlic; cook 1 minute longer. Transfer to a 5-qt. slow cooker; stir in the next 10 ingredients. Cook, covered, on low 4-5 hours. If desired, cube avocado and thinly slice green onions, and top when serving.

Yield: 10 servings

Quick and Easy Creamy Pumpkin Soup (From NDSU Extension Service)

- 2 cups finely chopped onions
- 2 green onions, sliced thinly, tops included
- 1/2 cup finely chopped celery
- 1 green chili pepper, chopped
- 1/2 cup canola oil
- 3 (14.5-ounce) cans chicken broth, reduced sodium, or 6 cups homemade chicken stock
- 1 3/4 cup fresh steamed and pureed pumpkin; or use 1 can 15 ounce solid-pack pumpkin
- 1 bay leaf
- 1-1/2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 1 cup undiluted, evaporated skim milk
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Parmesan cheese and fresh chopped parsley

In a 6-quart saucepan, sauté onions, green onions, celery and chili pepper in oil. Cook until onions begin to look translucent. Add broth, pumpkin, bay leaf and cumin. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer uncovered for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove bay leaf. Add evaporated milk and cook over low heat 5 minutes. Do not boil. Taste and adjust seasoning, if necessary. Add 1/2 teaspoon salt and 1/2 teaspoon black pepper, if desired. Garnish with grated Parmesan cheese and chopped parsley. Transfer hot soup to a cleaned pumpkin, if desired.

In order to keep the soup hot longer when transferring to a cleaned pumpkin, heat the cleaned pumpkin for 15 minutes on a cookie sheet at 350 F. This heats the inside up nicely but does not make the pumpkin soft. Once the soup is cleaned out, you can either fully cook the pumpkin for future use or discard it.
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