Ask an Expert: Four Reasons Pumpkins are the Perfect Fall Food

Pumpkins are great to use in decorating, but are just as great to use in dining. Here is why:

* Pumpkins are low in calories. One-half cup of mashed pumpkin (without salt) has 24 calories, 0 grams fat, 1 gram protein, 6 grams carbohydrates, 1 gram 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.

* Pumpkins are versatile. You can steam, bake, boil or microwave them (if you cut slits in them) and also pressure cook them. Once cooked they can be mashed, pureed or cubed. Mashed or pureed pumpkin (either fresh or canned) can be used in muffins, biscuits and quick breads; in soups and macaroni and cheese sauce; added to chili, a smoothie, cheese balls or hummus, to name just a few. Cubed and cooked pumpkin can be used with pasta, risotto, soups, salads and casseroles.

* Pumpkins can be preserved. Once pumpkins are cooked, they can be stored in either the fridge or freezer in air-tight containers for later use.

Here are two terrific recipes that include pumpkin.

**Pumpkin Chili**

Source: 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 can (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
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, top with cubed avocado and thinly sliced green onions when serving. Yields 10 servings.

**Pumpkin Soup (in a Pumpkin)**

Source: verybestbaking.com - Libby’s Pumpkin

1 pumpkin
2 cups milk or half and half
3 cups chicken broth
1 cup grated cheese
3 cups seasoned croutons

Cut the lid from the pumpkin, and remove seeds and fibers. Alternate layers of croutons and cheese in pumpkin.
Add chicken broth and milk. Bake for about 2 hours at 350 degrees. To serve, stir the contents into the pumpkin to create a thick, creamy soup.

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