

# Pumpkin Primer

One of the first cultivated foods of the Americas, pumpkins were a staple food in Oaxaca (Mexico) as early as 8750 BC—long before corn or beans. By 2700 BC, they had spread to the eastern United States .

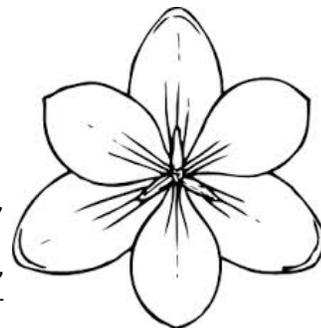
The Pueblo, Apaches, Hopi, Navajo, Havasupai, Papago, Pima and Yuman all counted on the pumpkin’s flesh and seeds as a staple food. They roasted the seeds and ate them with chili powder or mixed with fruits and nuts. As for the flesh, they roasted, dried or boiled it. Mashed boiled pumpkin was mixed with batter or syrup or used to thicken soup. Dried pumpkin was sliced into rings and hung in storerooms for winter.\*

Another historical pumpkin tidbit, resourceful African American slaves who were afforded few cooking utensils used carved out pumpkins and other squash as cooking pots.

From the Americas, pumpkins spread to Eastern Europe, India, Asia and the Mediterranean, where pumpkin seeds became a standard part of everyday cuisine and medical traditions. According to Muslim tradition, the Prophet Muhammad’s favorite food was pumpkin.\*\* Jack O’ Lanterns, carved from pumpkins, are a Halloween tradition linked to the Christian celebration of All Souls Day, initiated by the Irish. Today, Michigan is one of the top pumpkin producing states.

## Pumpkins in your garden

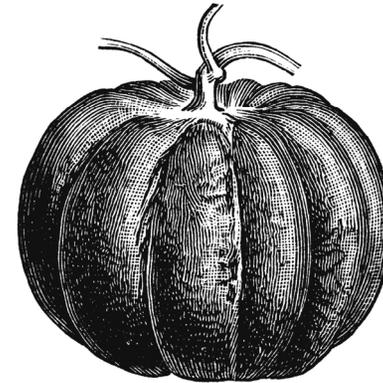
Pumpkins need a lot of space or a strong trellis to grow vertically. They also require six to eight hours of sun a day. Plant the seeds after danger of frost has passed. Water generously, early in the morning, when needed, at the plants base. Wet leaves can increase chances of powdery mildew disease. Deer, skunks and squirrels like to snack on growing pumpkins so take steps to fence them out or repel them. If you plan on eating the pumpkins, choose a food variety, If you want to grow them for jack-o-lanterns, choose a decorative variety.



*The pumpkin fruit starts as a large, beautiful yellow or orange flower.*

\*Source: American Indian Health and Diet Project, <http://www.aihd.ku.edu>

\*\*Source: Tirmidhi



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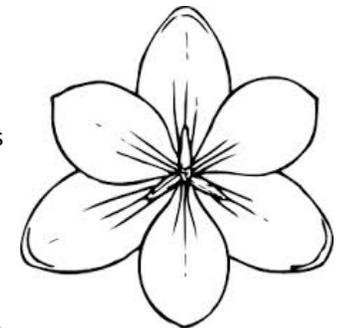
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## Pump Up Your Health with Pumpkins!

Pumpkin flesh is low in fat and rich in nutrients. One cup of cooked pumpkin provides three grams of fiber, magnesium, potassium and vitamins A, C and E—200% of your daily requirement of vitamin A (for healthy eyes). It also provides carotenoids, which can help lower your risk for cancer. Pumpkin seeds have anti-microbial benefits, including anti-fungal and anti-viral properties. So, they are a great snack during the cold and flu season. Studies on laboratory animals have shown pumpkin seeds may improve insulin regulation and help kidney function.

Because they are an excellent source of the mineral zinc, the World Health Organization recommends eating them. Eating whole, roasted unshelled pumpkin seeds gives you the most zinc.

You can buy pumpkins seeds at most grocery stores. Read the labels to make sure they do not have a lot of salt or chemical additives. They are also called pepitas. Pepitas are a very popular snack in the Latino culture, perhaps because some of their ancestors were among the first in the world to discover and cultivate pumpkins.



### Roasted Pumpkin Seeds

While most stores sell pumpkin seeds, it is fun and easy to make your own.

1. Remove the seeds from the pumpkin's inner cavity and wipe them off with dish towel to remove excess pulp sticking to them.
2. Spread them out evenly on a paper bag
3. Let them dry out overnight.
4. Place the seeds in a single layer on a cookie sheet
5. Light roast them in a 170 - 200°F oven for 15-20 minutes—no longer!

While a 200° roasting temperature brings out the full nut-like flavors in pumpkin seeds, roasting at 170° will better preserve the nutritional value of the healthy fats found in the seeds.

*Source: whfoods.com*

OUR KITCHEN TABLE



*Our Kitchen Table is a non-profit, grassroots community activist organization working for environmental justice and food security in Grand Rapids area urban communities.*

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