

PUMPKIN TIME

The air is crisp, the leaves are crinkling and as Halloween approaches, fall nudges you toward a pumpkin patch.

Pumpkins are a symbol of fall. Transforming the orange fruit into a light-up jack-o'-lantern can bring back childhood Halloween memories of the first time we were allowed to carve a pumpkin with a real knife, roasting pumpkin seeds and flickering candles casting a spooky glow.

"I think picking a pumpkin and then taking it home and carving it is such a sentimental thing for adults, and such a fun experience for kids," said Angie Treinen of Treinen Farm in Lodi.

Use these tips to find the perfect pumpkin, decorate it in an inspired way and carve your own masterpiece.

Pumpkin carving by Kevin Rades ▶
(from the Rades Family Pumpkin Carving Display in Appleton)



Carving a pumpkin

Carving a pumpkin masterpiece is slightly tedious, but you don't have to be an artist to do it. For beginners, kits like the ones created by Pumpkin Masters are a simple way to get the proper tools and templates to safely carve your favorite designs. Even without the kit the process remains the same. Carve your pumpkin one step at a time using the following tips before lighting your jack-o'-lantern this Halloween.



It's best to cut the pumpkin open from the bottom. That way, when it becomes a jack-o'-lantern, the pumpkin can be set directly over the candle or lightbulb.



Tools like ice cream scoops or a power-drill pumpkin gutter attachment help efficiently empty a pumpkin's gooey insides. Once the goop is out shave down the walls until they are only about 1-inch thick.



Pick a design for your creation and either trace it onto the pumpkin using a template or draw it free-hand.



Carefully carve along the lines of your outline with either a tool designed for carving pumpkins or a knife using extra care.



Now it's time to make the cute, spooky or fancy pumpkin into a jack-o'-lantern. Place the carving over a battery-operated light or candle and enjoy your pumpkin masterpiece.

Don't forget the seeds!

When you're digging out the gooey insides of the pumpkin, consider picking out the seeds for a tasty treat later. When you bake the seeds under a warm coating of butter, Worcestershire sauce and seasoned salt you get a crunchy fall snack. If you want crispier seeds, consider not washing off all of the guts from the pumpkin before baking them in the oven. That will add some extra crunch.

Using props

Using props is a great way to dress up a pumpkin. Whether that means pushing Mr. Potato Head-style pieces into the soft crust of the pumpkin, topping the stem with a warm winter hat or decorating with wire, glitter, leaves or whatever else you can find around the house, props can be just about anything. Using props is a chance to get creative with a pumpkin's design, while also providing a safer alternative to carving for kids.

Painting

When you carve a pumpkin the decoration will only survive for a few days, but if you paint a pumpkin it might even last the whole season. This is also a safer option for people with children who aren't quite ready to wield a knife. The key to painting a pumpkin that lasts is gently washing the surface first, even using a little bleach to prevent rotting. Then design with acrylic or washable paints. Spraying the completed pumpkin with a clear coat will help protect the paint and also give it a glossy shine. After the pumpkin is done, try to find a cool space to display it to help it keep longer.

Pumpkin, gourd or squash?

Though they are often used interchangeably, pumpkins, squashes and gourds are not all the same. Each come in their own shapes and sizes. Mix and match to make home decorations or fall treats.



Jill-Be-Little (Gourd)

They may look like miniature pumpkins, but these little orange fruits are actually gourds. Though they are not the best for carving, placing them around the house or drawing silly faces on them amp up the Halloween spirit.



Cinderella (Squash)

This fruit is similar in shape to the pumpkin carriage that takes Cinderella to the ball – thus the name. However, in reality the Cinderella is actually a squash that can still make a sweet pumpkin pie. Typically this pumpkin is a rich orange-red color.



Warted Gourd (Gourd)

This small warty gourd is sold and grown with other similarly small and warty gourds. Often people use these to fill decorative baskets or to accent a pumpkin display. Some farms also use them to shoot out of slingshots.



Jarrahdale (Squash)

The Jarrahdale is not a pumpkin but a squash. The unique greyish-green color of the Jarrahdale makes it ideal for carving witches, goblins or even Yoda and it's also great for adding a splash of color to a fall display.



Baby Pam (Pumpkin)

Because it is small and easy for kids to carry, many farms call it the field trip pumpkin. Others put it into the pie pumpkin category because it is small and has fewer seeds making it best for a flavorful pumpkin pie.



Autumn Wings (Gourd)

This small winged gourd has a longer neck in proportion to its body. It can come in multiple sizes often with elongated necks that curl around. Though this gourd is a yellow color, it can also come in green or orange hues.



Full Moon (Pumpkin)

These giant white pumpkins can weigh from 60 to 90 pounds. With their smooth creamy white-colored shell often people use the pumpkin to carve ghosts or paint on the face of a scarecrow. These large pumpkins add a nice touch to a home pumpkin display.

SOURCES: The Rades Family Pumpkin Carving Display; Treinen Farm; Busy Barns Adventure Farm

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