

The Mini Page®

Issue 42, 2026

Founded by Betty Debnam

Next Week:
Midterm Elections

Amazing Pumpkins



photo by Liz West

Mini Fact:
Pumpkins are grown on vines and are made of 90% water.

Red, orange and yellow leaves and bright orange pumpkins make autumn glow with color. It wouldn't be Halloween without jack-o'-lanterns. In many homes, it wouldn't be Thanksgiving without pumpkin pie.

The Mini Page learns more about pumpkins this week.

Pumpkin past



photo by Pherit

Pumpkins are native to the Americas. The seeds have been found at 10,000-year-old sites in Mexico. Native Americans ate the fruit, seeds, flowers and leaves. They roasted pumpkins in the fire or cooked the fruit in soups, puddings or a type of pie. By mixing the fruit with syrup, they made a kind of pumpkin jelly. They cut and dried strips of pumpkin to preserve it.

After drying strips of the shell, people wove them together to make mats. They used whole pumpkin shells for bowls and storage vessels.

Touchy crops

Pumpkin farming is a risky business. Pumpkins can be easily harmed by disease, insects and weather.

Imagine you are a farmer growing pumpkins for jack-o'-lanterns. What if your pumpkins mature too early? By Halloween, you could be left with a lot of rotting pumpkins. If the pumpkins mature too late, you'll miss the Halloween rush.

People like to carry pumpkins by the stems. If the stems break off, people won't buy them. But if the stems are too big, they can damage the pumpkins next to them.

Farmers want pumpkin skins to be pretty, without big spots. Sometimes if pumpkins are flat or weirdly shaped, people won't buy them. Size can also make a difference.

All in the family

Pumpkins are members of the **cucurbit** (kyoo-KUHR-bit) family. Their close cousins include squashes, gourds, zucchinis, cucumbers, watermelons, honeydews and cantaloupes.



photo by Minkey8885

To eat or not to eat

Pumpkins grown to make jack-o'-lanterns are **edible**, or fit to eat. But they are not as tasty as pumpkins grown especially for food.



photo by Felipe Miguel

Pumpkins are a very healthy food. This low-calorie fruit is filled with vitamins A, C and B, fiber and minerals such as potassium and iron. Pumpkin pie is a holiday favorite, but pumpkin is great in soups, breads, cookies, butter and casseroles, too. Roasted pumpkin seeds are a healthy snack. Pumpkin seeds are also sometimes called **pepitas** (peh-PEE-tahs).

Lighting up vegetables

Hundreds of years ago, the English, Irish and Scots made candlelit lanterns out of different fruits and vegetables, such as turnips, apples, beets, potatoes and cucumbers.



photo by Ben

In Scotland and Ireland, people carved scary faces out of these fruits and vegetables and placed candles inside. They hoped the creepy lighted faces would scare off evil spirits. In the 1800s, boys in Great Britain began playing tricks, frightening people with the spooky vegetable lights.

American colonists realized that pumpkins were the best of all for carving out a lantern.

Pumpkin records

The weight of pumpkins entered into contests has steadily grown over the years. In 1904, the largest pumpkin recorded was 403 pounds. One hundred years later, in 2004, the heaviest pumpkin recorded weighed 1,446 pounds.

In 2025, the world record for heaviest pumpkin was set by a pumpkin called "Muggle" that was grown by brothers Ian and Stuart Paton from the United Kingdom. Muggle weighed 2,819 pounds, 4 ounces. Its circumference was a little more than 21 feet.

Resources



On the Web:
- bit.ly/4wh0R24
- bit.ly/4vAnJsy

At the library:
- "The Pumpkin Book" by Gail Gibbons

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Try 'n' Find



Words that remind us of pumpkins are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are hidden backward or diagonally, and some letters are used twice. See if you can find:

CROP, CUCURBIT, EDIBLE, FARM, FIBER, FOOD, FRUIT, HALLOWEEN, HEALTHY, LANTERN, PEPITA, PUMPKINS, RECORD, SEED, SHELL, SIZE, STEM, VITAMINS.

M	P	E	P	I	T	A	V	H	V	T	R	A	Y	O
R	O	P	E	E	Y	E	T	S	I	I	R	A	X	I
A	D	L	Z	Z	D	I	N	S	T	U	E	Q	L	H
F	G	I	D	I	B	I	X	A	A	R	C	L	A	R
Z	S	X	B	R	K	V	W	H	M	F	O	L	N	S
P	K	L	U	P	F	H	F	T	I	L	R	E	T	E
O	E	C	M	M	F	O	O	D	N	K	D	H	E	E
R	U	U	S	T	E	M	J	Q	S	J	Q	S	R	D
C	P	V	U	Y	D	H	E	A	L	T	H	Y	N	H
F	I	B	E	R	N	E	E	W	O	L	L	A	H	B

Cook's Corner



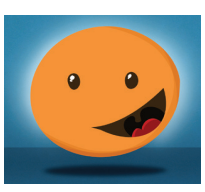
Autumn Pumpkin Bread

You'll need:
- 1 1/2 cups sugar
- 1 cup canola oil
- 3 eggs, slightly beaten
- 1 (15-ounce) can pumpkin
- 3 cups flour (whole-wheat or white)
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 3/4 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup chopped walnuts (optional)

What to do:
1. Beat sugar and oil using electric hand mixer. Add eggs and pumpkin; beat lightly.
2. Add all dry ingredients and mix well. Add nuts (if desired) and stir to mix.
3. Divide batter between 2 loaf pans lightly sprayed with cooking spray.
4. Bake at 350 degrees for 40 to 45 minutes until done. Let cool and serve. Makes 2 loaves.

** You'll need an adult's help with this recipe.*

7 Little Words for Kids



Use the letters in the boxes to make a word with the same meaning as the clue. The numbers in parentheses represent the number of letters in the solution. Each letter combination can be used only once, but all letter combinations will be necessary to complete the puzzle.

1. where a bank puts your money (7) _____
2. probably not (8) _____
3. school or house (8) _____
4. middle Beckham son (5) _____
5. wooden box (5) _____
6. light on a stand (4) _____
7. it goes around a picture (5) _____

ROM	LIK	ME	LD
TE	ACC	EO	OUNT
BUI	UN	ING	LA
FRA	CRA	MP	ELY

Answers: account, unlikely, building, Romeo, crate, lamp, frame.

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Mini Jokes



Patty: Who is the leader of all pumpkins?
Pete: Pumpkings!

Paulo: What do you get when you drop a pumpkin?
Paula: Squash!

Eco Note



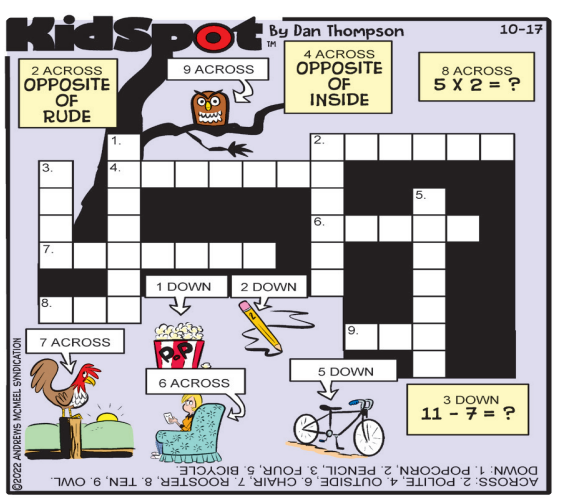
Computer simulations suggest that artificially brightening clouds over the Pacific Ocean could weaken a developing super El Niño and reduce some of its extreme weather impacts. The technique would spray tiny sea-salt particles into low clouds, causing them to reflect more sunlight and cool the ocean below. Researchers modeled the intervention during the powerful 1997-98 and 2015-16 El Niños and found that an early, sustained deployment could have almost eliminated both warming events. Scientists caution that the technology is not ready for use and could produce unintended effects, including altered rainfall and warming in other parts of the world.

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For later:

Look in your local newspaper for stories about pumpkins.

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