

It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown!

And it's Minnesota Grown!

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Thank goodness for winter squash! When the last of the green vegetables have disappeared from our Minnesota markets, stands fill with colorful squash varieties. And what would fall be without the pumpkin? As the most famous of all winter squashes, pumpkins have a special place in our hearts. There are so many fun activities involving pumpkins from baking pies, to picking the perfect pumpkin in the patch, to carving Jack-O-Lanterns for Halloween, and more. Buy [Minnesota Grown pumpkins](#) this fall and ensure yourself a local pumpkin experience!

The word “pumpkin” was originally derived from a Greek word meaning “large melon”. This was later adapted to the word *pompon* by the French, and finally to *pumpkin* by American colonists.

Pumpkins, like other squash, are native to North America. The oldest evidence? Pumpkin seeds dating between 7000 and 5500 BC found in Mexico. Today, however, pumpkins can be agriculturally produced on all continents but Antarctica. Pumpkins are widely grown for commercial use, and are used for both food and decoration. Pumpkin pie, for example, is a traditional part of Thanksgiving meals!

Pumpkins come in endless varieties. To find the perfect pumpkin, follow these tips!

For carving:

Look for a firm pumpkin that still has a 1 to 2 inch strong, sturdy stem attached. A strong, firm pumpkin will last longer than those with thin stems and soft spots. Choose pumpkins without cracks, small holes or blemishes. Don't be fooled! The deepest orange pumpkin is not always the ripest. Many varieties come in varying shades and colors.

To help your pumpkin last until Halloween, try coating the edges of your carving in petroleum jelly or vegetable oil. This will help to slow the pumpkin's decomposition. You should also keep your pumpkin out of direct sunlight, cover it with a wet towel when not on display, or refrigerate overnight.

For cooking:

Pumpkins for cooking are usually smaller than the typical Jack-O-Lantern variety. They contain a sweeter flesh that is less water and will work better for your favorite recipes.

Pumpkins can be baked, roasted, steamed, boiled, or made into your favorite sweet treats! Pumpkins are low in calories but high in healthy fiber, Vitamin A, and potassium. Don't forget about those savory pumpkin seeds!



Try the Kakai Pumpkin variety, Snack Jack, or Baby Bear next time you roast pumpkin seeds. You can figure that one pound of raw, untrimmed pumpkin will yield around one cup of finished pumpkin puree. A 5lb pumpkin is typically good for two 9-inch pies!

If you plan to store your pumpkin, heavier *is* better. Choose pumpkins that feel heavy for their size, ensuring a good amount of flesh inside. Don't choose a pumpkin that sounds hollow when thumped! A fatter pumpkin will sweeten over a few months of storage.

Pumpkin flesh also freezes well and will keep frozen for up to a year. Cut up your pumpkin, bake and mash the flesh, and store it in portioned plastic bags in your freezer. This way, you can enjoy your favorite pumpkin recipe throughout the year! This frozen local pumpkin can be substituted in the same amount for any recipe calling for canned pumpkin.

Some delicious pie pumpkin varieties include **Cinderella, Pink Banana, Sugar Pie, and Blue Hubbard**. Ask your local pumpkin farmer for tips!

Did you know... that often times the pumpkin pie filling you buy in the store is *not* actually pumpkin, and it doesn't need to be! Keep that in mind when you are making your favorite pumpkin breads, pies, or bars and try using one of those squashes you have purchased. To make a squash puree (reminiscent of that can of pie filling) simply take your squash – any kind will do – cut it in half, scoop out the seeds, and put each half cut side down on a rimmed baking sheet. Cook these in a 400-degree oven until you can easily make an impression in the skin of the squash with your finger. This can take anywhere between 20 and 40 minutes. Then, scoop the flesh from the skin and puree in a food processor or blender. This also keeps well in the freezer!

For many fall baking and cooking recipes, winter squash varieties are nearly interchangeable, but not all. Only a few varieties of winter squash, referred to as delicata squashes, have edible skins. These can be simply sliced and fried for a tasty side dish! When you want nice, smooth cubes that hold their shape, such as in curries, soups, and chilli, butternut squash is best. Butternut, along with kabocha, acorn, and turban are also the best substitutes for pumpkin in your recipes.



Spaghetti squash is easily identified next to other varieties. Lemon yellow and football shaped, this squash is not particularly good for pureeing, as it is stringy and watery. This is best served baked, and served with

butter and herbs. You can also serve this with your favorite spaghetti sauce as a healthy alternative to noodles!

After purchase, squash can be stored in a cool place on your counter for up to a month. If you hope to store longer, they should be placed in a basement or garage. Remember to keep your delicata varieties in the refrigerator!

To decorate:

Did you know that pumpkins can be dark green, blue, green with stripes, yellow, tan, pink, white, or bright red? Whew! That's a lot! There are so many varieties of pumpkins, each with their own shape and color. Mix up your fall décor with interesting new pumpkin types, squashes, and gourds. If you are looking for fun decorating ideas, be sure to check out our [FALLing for Minnesota Pinterest board](#) for DIY projects and activities!

It's the world's largest pumpkin, Charlie Brown! Did you know, according to a press release by the New York Botanical Garden, Tim and Susan Mathison from California grew a squash that weighed 2,032 pounds in 2013 – wowza! It is said that this pumpkin took 105 days to reach its enormous size. Our only question? How many pumpkin pies will that make me?!

To find a pumpkin farm near you, visit MinnesotaGrown.com!

Have fun and happy fall!