

In Your Garden It's Pumpkin Time

Happy Jack O'lanterns
In windows Halloween night.
Lilittle spook and goblin faces
In the flickering light.
Shouting gleefully
They run from door to door
Though their shopping bags are full
They'll trick or treat for more.
In that window, on this porch
Carved, glowing pumpkins mean,
You kids are welcome at this home.
And Happy Halloween.

Carved pumpkins ... Jack-O'lanterns ... the symbol of Halloween fun. Whether you can get your youngsters to eat a spoonful of squash or not, there are few who don't appreciate the ones we call pumpkins. They are fun. The seeds are good to eat, and carving the face on a big orange beauty is part of our American tradition.

I guess I'm still a kid at heart, says James A. Fizzell, University of Illinois Horticulturist in Cook County, because I still look forward to going to the farm to pick out and carve a jack O'lantern.

The original jack-O'-lantern according to Irish legend was a ne'er-do-well kinsman known as Jack O'Lantern. Turned away from heaven and doomed to roam the depths for ever, he hollowed out a turnip, lighted with a coal from the devil's furnace to find his way.

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Irish immigrants replaced the turnip with the pumpkin, thus the Halloween tradition.

Pumpkins are native to this country. Besides their use as Jack-O'lanterns they have been immortalized in legend and history ... They were obviously a vital source of food to the earliest settlers in this country, found their way into literature in the **Legend of Sleepy Hollow**, and into intrigue ala the Alger Hiss microfilms.

While most pumpkins end up with carved faces, there are many other ways you can use them. Who can resist pumpkin pie with some ice cream on the side or whipped cream on top?

Pumpkins are everywhere now. Take your youngsters out to one of the area farms or a roadside stand. Some farms will still let the kids pick their own pumpkins. Others have attractions such as haunted houses or petting zoos. And, school tours are welcome too.

While your children are picking out the perfect candidates for their Jack O'lanterns, buy some pumpkins for cooking too.

Pumpkins store well if kept in a cool dry place such as a basement or store room. They will last several months at about 50 degrees, as long as they are undamaged. Be sure ones you store have the stems on them. Or, cut them up and freeze them for future use.

Small pumpkins usually are grown for pies. One will be just about the right size for a pie. Intermediate sizes are best for jack O'lanterns.

And, just in case you are interested, giant sized pumpkins are enormous and the winning entry at each year's Half Moon Bay Pumpkin Festival in California regularly tops a quarter ton. How many pies would that make?