

It's a Gardener's World!

I couldn't let this weekend go by (Stokesley Show Weekend) without talking about the biggest & the best!

But is it a fruit or a vegetable? The pumpkin, from a botanist's perspective, is a fruit because it's a product of the seed-bearing structure of flowering plants. Vegetables, on the other hand, are the edible portion of plants such as leaves, stems, roots, bulbs, flowers, and tubers. Because pumpkins are less sweet and more savoury from a culinary perspective, we categorize them as a vegetable. There is no denying that once autumn rolls in, the pumpkin reigns supreme. It seems that no food symbolizes the blustery fall season quite like a pumpkin.



An orange fruit/vegetable normally harvested in October, this nutritious and versatile plant features flowers, seeds and flesh that are edible and rich in vitamins. Pumpkin is used to make soups, desserts and breads, and many Americans include pumpkin pie in their Thanksgiving meals. Pumpkin was for sure at the first Thanksgiving for the pilgrims. They had much to thank the pumpkin for, as corn and wheat crops were not very dependable. The pumpkin is a very nutritious food and most likely kept them alive many winters. Here is a poem from the era that tells it all:

*"For pottage and puddings and custards and pies
Our pumpkins and parsnips are common supplies,
We have pumpkins at morning and pumpkins at noon,
If it were not for pumpkins we should be undone."
Pilgrim verse, circa 1633*

However the first pumpkin pie may have not had a nice fluted pastry crust. Using the pumpkin as a cooking vessel was very practical. They cut off the top, scooped out the seeds and put into the centre a mixture of cream, spices, eggs and honey. They then put the top of the pumpkin back on and placed it in the coals to roast. In a few hours the top could be taken off and the filling served.

Carving pumpkins into Jack-o'-Lanterns is a popular Halloween tradition that originated hundreds of years ago in Ireland. Back then, however, jack-o'-lanterns were made out of turnips or potatoes; it wasn't until Irish immigrants arrived in America and discovered the pumpkin that a new Halloween ritual was born.

Pumpkin Facts

- ❖ Pumpkins are a member of the gourd family, which includes cucumbers, honeydew melons, cantaloupe, watermelons and zucchini/courgettes. These plants are native to Central America and Mexico, but now grow on six continents.
- ❖ The largest pumpkin pie ever baked was in 2005 and weighed 2,020 pounds.
- ❖ Pumpkins have been grown in North America for five thousand years. They are indigenous to the western hemisphere.
- ❖ In 1584, after French explorer Jacques Cartier explored the St. Lawrence region of North America, he reported finding "gros melons." The name was translated into English as "pompions," which has since evolved into the modern "pumpkin."
- ❖ Pumpkins are low in calories, fat, and sodium and high in fibre. They are good sources of Vitamin A, Vitamin B, potassium, protein, and iron.
- ❖ Pumpkin seeds should be planted between the last week of May and the middle of June. They take between 90 and 120 days to grow and are picked in October when they are bright orange in colour. Their seeds can be saved to grow new pumpkins the next year.

- ❖ Competition is fierce in the world of car-sized pumpkins. According to the Guinness World Records, the current heaviest pumpkin weighs 1,190.49 kg (2,624.6 lb), which was grown by Mathias Wille mijns (Belgium) and authenticated by the Great Pumpkin Commonwealth (GPC) in Ludwigsburg, Germany, on 9 October 2016. Oh dear, Harry's got a way to go!

How do you choose your pumpkin for Halloween? Do you know that God chose you to be his very own? **"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight"** (Ephesians 1:4).

On the outside, our pumpkin might look strong and beautiful. But, after cutting off the top, we look inside and see that it is full of slimy 'gunk'. Similarly, on the outside, we may look good, but God can see inside our heart: **"The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart"** (1 Samuel 16:7b). All of us have "gunk" inside. The Bible tells us: **"There is no one righteous, not even one"** (Romans 3:10).

As we remove the inside of the pumpkin, we learn good news. God can make us clean on the inside! The Bible teaches: **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"** (1 John 1:9).

As we carve a happy face on the pumpkin, we are reminded of the joy that God gives us. The Bible says: **"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy"** (1 Peter 1:8).

As we place a candle or a light inside the pumpkin, we are reminded that Jesus doesn't want to leave us empty inside, he wants to fill our hearts with his love and his light: **"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts"** (2 Corinthians 4:6a).

And remember, we need to let our light shine for others to see: **"In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven"** (Matthew 5:16).

So whether we are the biggest & the best, or simply runners-up, as the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard reminds us, **'So the last will be first, & the first will be last'**. We are each worthy of God's generosity & we'll all get a rosette for trying our best!