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How to Cook a Pumpkin

You will need ...a pumpkin, a sturdy pan, a fork, a sharp knife, cutting board, coffee filters, a colander (strainer) and a food mill or sieve.

To begin...thoroughly wash your pumpkin with soap and water using a scrubbing brush---get into all those nooks and crannies. Rinse with clear cold water. Dry with a towel.

Pre-heat your oven to 350 degrees. Remove all racks in the oven leaving the bottom rack in place. The pumpkin and the pan need lots of room.

Place the pumpkin on a secure cutting surface---avoid slippery surfaces. Using a butcher knife (big sharp knife) cut your pumpkin in half. (Cut the pumpkin in half--- north to south). It is ok if the stem breaks off or you can leave the stem intact.

Clean out the seeds (save these for roasting) and all the stringy, fibrous inner parts. Remember...save the seeds (great snack) and discard the rest. You will be baking both pumpkin halves without the seeds and fibrous inner parts.

For your baking, select a large sturdy cookie sheet (great ones are available in Wal-Mart in the kitchen baking section). Do not grease the cookie sheet--- do not add water to the cookie sheet. The only thing on the pan will be the pumpkin.

Lay the pumpkin halves cut side down on the cookie sheet. The halves can be side by side; it is ok if they are touching. (Some pumpkins are so large you can only bake one half at a time).

Bake the pumpkin halves for approximately 45 minutes. The halves are done when a fork can easily slide in and out of the rind. Smaller pumpkins take a shorter amount of time...larger ones take longer.

Once baked, remove the pumpkin halves from the oven. Be careful...the cookie sheet will probably have water on it now. This water has "cooked out" of the pumpkin and can be saved to make a wonderful soup broth. The broth can be flavored to make wonderful stock. The broth stock can be frozen for later use.

Leave the pumpkin halves on the cookie sheet and transfer the cookie sheet to the counter top to cool down. After an hour or so the pumpkins will be cool enough to handle with your hands. Using your hands, peel away and discard the rind of the pumpkin. Transfer the pumpkin pulp to a bowl.

For better results with your baking projects the pulp should be drained. Typically pumpkins are full of water. If most of the water is not removed the success of your baked goods will be compromised. To remove the water from the pulp drain the pulp in a coffee filter lined colander (3-4 hours).

Next, take the drained pulp and sieve it down to remove all lumps and to make it a nice smooth product. To sieve---use a food mill. A food processor can also be used as well as the back of a fork (mash pulp---using the back of a fork). Drain again in coffee filter lined colander 3-4 hours.

The pulp that remains in the colander is now a thick, rich product ready to use in your favorite recipe. For accurate measuring and successful baking, measure the pulp in a dry measuring cup and level with a spatula.

If you will not be using the strained pulp in 2-3 days it should be frozen for later use. Freeze the pulp in seal tight containers or in freezer quality re-sealable zippered storage bag. Personally I like to measure 2 cups of pulp into a freezer quality re-sealable zippered storage bag and freeze them flat in a single layer. Once frozen, the frozen flat packages can be stacked making the best use of your freezer space. Most recipes use 2 cups mashed pumpkin pulp so freezing the pulp in 2 cup packages is a big time saver plus there is less waste of time, energy and product.

Remember there are no preservatives or additives in this freshly processed farm fresh pumpkin. This is a fresh natural good for you food product rich with antioxidants. Without the preservatives it will not hold in your refrigerator for an extended period of time---so--- use it within 2-3 days or freeze it.

The #1 choice for pie baking is the Long Island Cheese pumpkin. Other good choices include Lumina, Jarrahdale, and Fairy Tale. Cinderella is a good choice but seems to have more water. Also, butternut squash works very well in pumpkin pie recipes.