

Seasonal Eating
Whitney Danhof, Extension Agent

Pumpkin Tricks and Treats
October 2011

Jack-o-lanterns and decorating might be the most popular use of pumpkins this time of year, but the real treasure lies in the smaller pie pumpkins that are made for cooking. Pumpkin bread, pumpkin muffins, pumpkin pie, pumpkin cake, even roasted pumpkin with maple syrup or a creamy pumpkin soup highlight this wonderful fall vegetable.

While all pumpkins are edible, the small ones like small sugar or New England Pie pumpkins are higher in sugar content and better for baking and cooking. The large jack-o-lanterns have thinner walls and are stringier than the smaller, sweeter varieties. The bright orange color of pumpkin tells you that it is an excellent source of vitamin A and a good source of vitamin C so it is nutritious and delicious.

Commercially canned pumpkin is the easiest way to cook with pumpkin, but fresh ones can be turned into puree just like the canned while they're in season. Cut the pumpkin open and remove the seeds and strings. To steam or boil, cut into smaller pieces and peel. Steam or boil until tender when poked with a fork (30-50 minutes depending on size). For baked, place halves upside down on a foil lined baking sheet and bake at 350 degrees until tender (1-2 hours depending on size). Mash with a potato masher, puree with a food processor or put through a food mill. Generally a 5 pound pumpkin will yield about 4 cups of puree (a 15 ounce can is roughly 2 cups of puree). If your puree seems watery you can cook it down or drain it through some cheesecloth. You can use your pumpkin puree now or freeze it for later.

Canning pumpkin is another great way to have pumpkin throughout the year. You can only safely can cubed pumpkin. You mash it later when you take it out to use it in a recipe. Do not can mashed pumpkin as it varies too much in viscosity to have a consistent recommendation. To can cubed pumpkin (or any winter squash), cut your pumpkin into 1" wide strips and peel. Cut into 1" cubes and boil in water for 2 minutes. Place the hot cubes in the jars and cover with the cooking water to 1" from the top of the jar. Put your lids on and process in a pressure canner for 55 minutes for pints and 90 minutes for quarts at 11 pounds of pressure.

One of my favorite pumpkin recipes is Pumpkin Bars. This is actually a sheet cake baked in a jelly roll pan and topped with a creamy cream cheese frosting with the secret surprise of orange extract. Orange and pumpkin are a delicious combination and truly complement each other in this recipe. The cake is so moist and fills the



house with the smell of pumpkin pie while it bakes. These bars are great for a fall potluck, chili party or Halloween dinner. Enjoy the best treat of the season - Pumpkin.

For more ideas on using pumpkins, turnips and winter squash, visit the Bedford County Extension website Seasonal Eating page. The Seasonal Eating Cooking Demonstration will be held on Wednesday, October 19 at 12:00 noon at the UT Extension Office. Call the office at 684-5971 for more information or to sign up by October 17th and bring \$5.00 to class to cover the samples.

Pumpkin Bars

- 4 large eggs
- 1 2/3 cups sugar
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 1 (15-ounce) can 100% pumpkin (not pumpkin pie mix)
- 2 cups flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 2 teaspoons pumpkin pie spice
- 1 (3-ounce) package cream cheese, softened
- 1/2 cup butter, softened
- 2 teaspoons orange extract
- 2 cups powdered sugar
- 1-2 tablespoons milk, as needed

Line a 15 x 10 inch jelly roll pan with parchment or waxed paper. Coat with non-stick spray. To make the bars, in a large bowl, beat together the eggs, granulated sugar and oil until blended. Add the pumpkin and mix until smooth. Stir in the flour, baking powder, baking soda and pumpkin pie spice and continue stirring until smooth. Pour into the prepared pan and bake at 350 degrees until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, 20 to 25 minutes. Remove from the oven and let cool completely in the pan on a rack. To make frosting, with an electric mixer, beat the cream cheese, butter and orange extract in a large bowl until blended. Add the powdered sugar and beat or process until the mixture reaches a spreadable consistency. You may need to add a little more sugar or a little milk to make it the right consistency. Spread over cooled bars.