

Tim Lewis
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Seeing all those good-looking pumpkins at roadside stands, grocery stores, and the Georgia National Fair has made me wish I had grown some this year. Maybe you wish you had too. So I decided to put together the following article on pumpkins.

Pumpkins are really squashes. They are members of the Cucurbita family which includes squash and cucumbers. Pumpkins are grown all over the world on six of the seven continents. The self-proclaimed pumpkin capital of the world is Morton, Illinois, where Libby's has its pumpkin industry and processing plant.

Pumpkins are believed to have been first grown in Central America. Native American Indians used pumpkins in their diet long before the Pilgrims landed. They soon taught the settlers how to grow them. They also took pumpkin seeds back to Europe, where their popularity quickly spread. The early settlers used pumpkins in a wide variety of recipes, from desserts to stews and soups. They made pumpkin pie by filling in a hollowed out shell with milk, honey, and spices, then baking it. They also used cut strips of pumpkins and used them to weave into mats.

Pumpkins are used today in hundreds of recipes. Did you know that:

- Pumpkins were once believed to help eliminate freckles?
- Pumpkins were once used as a remedy for snakebites?
- Many facial crèmes contain pumpkin?
- Pumpkins have zero cholesterol and are low in salt?
- Pumpkins contain beta carotene which has been shown to reduce certain types of cancer and lowers the risk of heart disease?

How about some pumpkin records? The new world record holder is Christy Harp of Ohio, who brought a 1,725 pound pumpkin to the Ohio Valley Giant Pumpkin Growers Weigh-Off on Saturday, October 3, 2009. This new record beat the previous record of 1,689 pounds set by Joe Jutras from North Scituate, Rhode Island.

The Georgia record is currently held by Jason Gagne of Mineral Bluff who, just this year, produced a pumpkin weighing a whopping 1,252 pounds! Not bad for Georgia, where it is fairly difficult to grow pumpkins due to the humidity and subsequent disease problems.

There is something charming about pumpkins. Buy some this year and try growing some next year—you'll be glad you did!

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