

Fall Weather Means Pumpkins are Here!

Submitted by Barbara Roths, Family Consumer Sciences Agent, Butler County Extension Office

Pumpkins are a sure way to know that autumn is here! We see them in gardens, on porches, in front of grocery stores, and in roadside stands. We use them for decorating, for carving, and for eating. So, whether you've already got your pumpkin OR you're still waiting to make that purchase, here are some tips, courtesy of Ward Upham, Kansas State University. These tips will help you choose pumpkins and help them last awhile. The best pumpkins will be:

* **Whole.** This includes pumpkins with a painted face. **Carved** jack-o-lanterns do well if they last a week.

* **Stemmed.** This is most important for outdoor pumpkins. "Lost" stems leave a depression behind that will collect water, snow, and/or ice and then promote spoilage.

Don't carry the pumpkin by its stem, even when you're shopping!

* **Dry-stemmed.** Almost all commercial varieties now have green stems, so "mature" stem color no longer matters. If a stem is leaking sap, however, that indicates the pumpkin was too young for harvesting.

* **Fully mature.** Try to pierce the rind with a thumbnail. It's easy with immature pumpkins and difficult with those that are ripe.

* **Blemish-free with no soft spots.** This characteristic does not include the bumps and hard "pimples" that are natural for some varieties. Some of those bumps and warts make the pumpkins look "scarier."

* **Cured** – This is difficult to assess if store owners don't know. If you select your pumpkin from a field, cure it for about 10 days, preferably in temperatures of 80-85 F and a relative humidity of 80-85 percent.

* **Dry and cool.** Cured pumpkins don't like to be wet. And, although they like being cool, harvested pumpkins respond badly to cold weather. They start to degrade when temperatures fall below 50 degrees. They turn into mush overnight when they freeze.

Keep pumpkins dry and cool when you're using pumpkins outdoors. Keep them out of expected rainfalls and bring them in when the nights are cold.

Looking for a great fall recipe? Pumpkin is an ingredient but the "surprise!" is how good these cupcakes taste!

Chocolate Surprise Cupcakes

1 can (15 ounces) pumpkin

1 box (18 ounces) chocolate cake mix

3 eggs

¾ cup (6 ounces) apple juice

½ cup walnuts, chopped

1. Preheat oven to 350F. Grease or spray muffin tins with cooking spray.
2. Combine the pumpkin, cake mix, eggs, and apple juice in a large mixing bowl.
3. Beat batter well. Fill muffin tins 2/3 full of batter. Sprinkle walnuts on top.
4. Bake according to package directions for cupcakes (about 20 minutes).
5. Cupcakes are done when a toothpick inserted into a cupcake comes out clean.
6. Let cool on rack for 5-10 minutes. Remove from tin. *(from Iowa State Extension)*

*Call Barb at the Butler County Extension Office at 316 -321-9660
or email at broths@ksu.edu for more tips for tasty, healthy foods!*