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Kindred *Spirits*

Decorations or Treats: It's Pumpkin Time!

Pumpkin Facts

Pumpkin is a great source of beta-carotene which is good for vision, healthy skin and a strong immune system. It is also a good source of fiber and potassium. When added to baked goods, pumpkin adds nutrients as well as moisture and color.

1/4 cup of pumpkin seeds (roasted with 1/2 T. oil and 1/2 t. salt) provides:

202 calories
8 gms. Protein
6 gms. Carbohydrates
18 gms. Fat
297 mgs. Sodium

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It is time for Halloween; costumes, jack-o-lanterns and fun. And just in time there is a wealth of pumpkins to harvest and enjoy.

"With planning, the jack-o-lantern can do double duty in your house as a decoration and also as a tasty, healthy treat," says Glenda Kinder, MU Extension nutrition and health specialist. So, rather than cutting a face into the pumpkin, use non-toxic paint or markers to draw a unique face. Then, when Halloween is over, harvest and roast the seeds and prepare the pulp for pies, breads and other baked goods. Here is how you prepare the pumpkin for cooking.

Wash and cut in half a mature pumpkin. Scoop out the seeds and fibers, rub the cut surface with oil and place the halves, cut side down, on a baking sheet. Bake in a moderately hot oven (350° F) until tender when pierced with a fork through the skin. This may take 45 to 60 minutes for smaller pumpkins, even longer for larger ones. Scoop out the cooked flesh and press through a food mill, or a food processor or blender.

To make pumpkin pulp dense and richer for pies, place the mashed pumpkin in a strainer over a pan and let drain for 30 minutes to remove excess liquid. Then evaporate this juice by boiling it to almost nothing and mix it back into the pureed pulp for superior flavor and consistency for pie-making. To store for the holidays, measure puree in quantities used for your favorite recipes and freeze in appropriate containers.

According to the National Center for Home Food Preservation, you can also dry and then roast the seeds. First carefully wash the seeds to remove the clinging fibrous pumpkin tissue. Seeds can be dried in a dehydrator at 115° - 120° F for 1-2 hours or in an oven on warm for 3-4 hours.

Stir frequently to avoid scorching. Then to roast seeds, toss dried pumpkin seeds with a small amount of oil and/or salt and roast in a preheated oven at 250° F for 10-15 minutes. Cool and store in an air tight container. Yummy and nutritious!

Healthy Trick or Treating

Protect your children from sugar shock

What's scarier than ghosts, goblins and ghouls? For parents, it's the "sugar shock" that results when their children gobble fistfuls of sugar-loaded candy on Halloween.

Parents don't want to be wicked witches who spoil the trick-or-treat fun for their own little pirates and princesses. Nor do they want to disappoint the transformers and zombies who come knocking at their door. But, how does a parent who cares about diet and health handle this dilemma on Halloween?

"Candy is fine in moderation and everyone loves it. However, it's hard to eat anything in moderation," says Saralee Jaimeson, MU Extension human development specialist. "Halloween is an excellent time to be a good role model for your children." Set the example by making a healthy choice for what will be passed out at your house on Halloween night. Offer children cereal bars, dried fruit, snack pretzels, individual boxes of raisins, peanuts, crackers and cheese, cereal boxes, string cheese, pudding or jello cups.

There are fun alternatives available that promote health

rather than encourage unhealthy, high-sugar and fat choices. For trick or treat bags, try toothbrushes, jump ropes, stickers, whistles, sidewalk chalk, pencils and erasers, crayons, mini kazoos, yoyos, adjustable rings, bubbles or pennies (they're heavy and jingle like a chain).

It is important for parents who encourage healthy eating habits to be consistent on holidays and special occasions. While a special treat now and then is not going to harm anyone, it is important that children do not learn to associate celebrations, good behavior and special events as opportunities to gorge on sweets.

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Halloween Do's and Don'ts

According to Lisa Wallace, MU Extension human development specialist, the following guidelines can help keep your small trick-or-treaters safe this Halloween.

- Dress your child in a light-colored, flame-resistant costume decorated with reflective tape.
- Avoid costumes that obscure vision or long costumes that may trip children.
- Use a flashlight or battery-powered device to make pumpkins glow instead of candles.
- Clear your yard, steps and porch of items that kids can trip over. Keep outside lights on.
- Accompany children age 12 and younger on trick-or-treat rounds.
- Look over the candy and other treats carefully before you allow your child to eat any. Throw away any treats with torn or missing wrappers.
- Purchase costumes, masks, beards and wigs with a "flame-resistant" label.