

HOW TO COOK A PUMPKIN

If you're the type who enjoyed making gloppy mud pies as a kid, you should enjoy this. If you weren't, prepare to wash your hands a few times.

Wash the outside of the pumpkin and slice it in half crosswise. Here's the really messy part...with your hands, scoop out strings and seeds and put them in a bowl-type strainer or colander. As you get out all of the strings, some seeds will slip free. Add these to the colander.

When all of the seeds are removed, put the colander under cold running water and begin to work the seeds free from the strings. As they slip free, discard the strings and keep rinsing until there is nothing left but seeds. Drain the seeds and set them aside for toasting.

With a spoon (a serrated grapefruit spoon works best), scrape the inside of the pumpkin free of any extra strings.

Cut the pumpkin halves into manageable chunks (you can leave it in two pieces if your oven is big enough) and place them on a large baking sheet, shell side up. It's best to put the baking sheet on the top or middle rack and line the lower rack with foil to minimize spills. The pumpkin will drain as it bakes, so keep an eye on it and be ready to drain off overflowing juice with a baster.

Bake in a 325 degree oven for about 1 hour, until it is tender and begins to fall apart (skin may blister slightly). Remove from oven and let the chunks cool until you can handle them. Cut the pumpkin meat from the shell (the shell may just peel off in places). Puree the meat in a blender or put it through a ricer or strainer.

Cooked pumpkin will keep refrigerated for about 1 week or can be sealed in plastic bags and frozen for about 6 months. Measure it into bags in ½ cup and 1 cup servings to make it easier to dole out for recipes.

To Microwave: clean pumpkin and slice into chunks as directed above. Place skin-side down on microwave safe plate and cover with plastic. Cook on high (100% power) for 8 to 10 minutes until tender. Puree as directed above.