

October 23, 2014



Pumpkin and Winter Squash Fun

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UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County

Our classes are over for 2014, but we are still in harvest season. Take the time now to seek out those wonderful little sugar pie pumpkins for excellent preserving. The following instructions apply to not only pumpkins, but winter squash as well.

Puree: Puree pumpkin/winter squash using any of the following methods:

Bake: Cut in half; scrape out strings and seeds. Place the pumpkin in a pan, cut side down. Bake at 325°F for one hour or more, until soft. Cool and remove the pulp from the shell and mash.

Steam: Cut into large chunks; scrape out the strings and seeds. Place the chunks in a single layer on a rack suspended above boiling water. Cover container and boil for 30 to 45 minutes or until the pulp becomes soft. Scrape pulp away from the skin. Cool and mash.

Simmer: Cut into chunks; remove the seeds and strings. Peel; cover with a small amount of water, no more than necessary. Salt lightly if desired. Cook covered until tender; drain and mash. If the puree is watery, drain puree for 30 minutes in a strainer.

Pumpkin, which is pureed in a food processor or blender, gives a light, smooth consistency to the recipes, as compared to puree that has been mashed or pressed through a sieve. Use the puree within 24 hours or freeze.

Freezing Pumpkin/Winter Squash: Cool fresh puree by placing it in a pan of ice water and stirring frequently. Pack puree in freezer containers, leaving ½" headspace. Puree that is in contact with the air may turn dark, which does not affect the quality or flavor of the puree. Pressing plastic wrap onto the surface before covering or mixing lemon juice in with the puree may control its tendency to darken.

To Defrost Frozen Pumpkin/Winter Squash: Fresh frozen pumpkin defrosts nicely and should be ready to use in only an hour after removing from the freezer. Thaw food in the refrigerator at 40°F or less, in cold running water less than 70°F, or in the microwave if you'll be cooking or serving it immediately.

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Canning Pureed Pumpkin or Winter Squash:Home canning is not recommended for pumpkin butter or any mashed or pureed pumpkin or winter squash. Because of the variation of the thickness of pumpkin/winter squash puree, tests have not found a heat processing method that guarantees an even temperature distribution. Pumpkin and winter squash are also low-acid foods capable of supporting the growth of Clostridium botulinum bacteria which can cause the very serious illness, botulism, under the right storage conditions. If the bacteria are present and survive processing, and the product has a high enough water activity level, they can thrive and produce toxin in the product. Therefore, freeze pumpkin butters or mashed squash.

Canning Cubed Pumpkin or Winter Squash:Only pressure canning methods are recommended for canning cubed pumpkin. An average of 16 pounds is needed per canner load of 7 quarts; an average of 10 pounds is needed per canner load of 9 pints – an average of 2¼ pounds of product per quart. Pumpkins and squash should have a hard rind, and stringless, mature pulp. Small size pumpkins (sugar or pie varieties) make better products. Wash; remove seeds, cut into 1” wide slices, and peel. Cut flesh into 1” cubes. Boil 2 minutes in water. Ladle hot pumpkin into hot jars; fill with hot liquid leaving 1” headspace. Remove air bubbles; adjust headspace if necessary. Wipe rims; place lids and rings on jars. Tighten rings only finger tight.

Roasting Pumpkin/Winter Squash Seeds:Remove the seeds from a pumpkin; wash and remove the stringy material. Drain and spread to dry. Use an electric dehydrator at 115-120°F for 1 to 2 hours or in an oven on a very low, warm temperature only, for 3 to 4 hours. Stir frequently to avoid scorching. Dried seeds should not be stored with any moisture left in them.

Toss dried pumpkin seeds with oil and/or salt and roast in a preheated oven at 250°F for 10 to 15 minutes. Source: National Center for Home Food Preservation

Use your canned or frozen pumpkin/winter squash as you would commercially canned. Make pies, cakes, cookies, pancakes and puddings. Of course, you can just heat and eat it, too. Pumpkin/Winter Squash are a wonderful source of nutrition in a season when fresh vegetables are not as plentiful as summer.

While UCCE MFP public classes have ended for the season in El Dorado County, monthly classes continue in Amador and Calaveras counties. Check out their schedule at <http://ucanr.edu/mfpcs>. UCCE MFP of El Dorado County free public classes will resume next summer.

UCCE Master Food Preservers are also available to answer home food preservation questions; leave a message at (530) 621-5506. For more information about the public education classes and activities, go to the UCCE Master Food Preserver website at http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/Master_Food_Preservers/. Sign up to receive our international E-Newsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpnews/>. Find us on Facebook too (UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County)!