

Pumpkins

The pumpkin is a **vegetable**, but most pumpkins grown today are sold for decorating and carving. They come in all sizes and shapes, from mini-pumpkins, the size of apples, to giant ones, weighing over 200 pounds. Some pumpkins are gray or pale green, but most are yellow or orange. Some are even white.

Pumpkin flowers are large and yellow. Some kinds of pumpkins are grown for cattle to eat. Cucumbers, squash, melons and **gourds** are all related to the great pumpkin.

The pumpkin is one of only a few foods we still eat today that is **native** to North America. American Indians used them as food and medicine. Dried pumpkin shells served as bowls or containers for storing grains and seeds. The Indians also flattened strips of pumpkins, dried them and made mats from them.

Pumpkins were a main part of the Pilgrims' daily diet because they would keep for several months, if left uncut and stored in a cool, dry place. Colonists made pumpkin pies by slicing off pumpkin tops, removing the seeds, filling the insides with milk, spices and honey, then baking it all in hot ashes. The Pilgrims' dependence on pumpkins is reflected in this poem, from 1630. (Notice the old English "undoon" for "undone," or finished.)

For **pottage** and puddings and custards and pies,
Our pumpkins and parsnips are common supplies,
We have pumpkins at morning and pumpkins at noon,
If it were not for pumpkins we should be **undoon**.

The **tradition** of carving pumpkins at Halloween started with the Irish, but the original jack-o-lanterns were made from turnips. When the Irish **immigrated** to the U.S., they found pumpkins a plenty, and they were much easier to carve than turnips.

The pumpkin is a member of the **cucurbit** family. Some of the world's largest fruits are pumpkins. Pumpkins range in size from less than a pound to over 1,000 pounds. According to *Cucurbits*, the official newsletter of the World Pumpkin Confederation, a 2005 record-breaking pumpkin weighed in at 1,469 pounds, and a giant squash tipped the scales at just over 962 pounds (436 kg).

The town of Roffstown, New Hampshire, holds an annual pumpkin **regatta** each October, in which giant pumpkins are **hollowed** out to make room for a single passenger, then fitted with **trolling** motors and paraded on the Piscataquog River.

Vocabulary

carve—to cut with care or exactness

cucurbit— a plant of the gourd family

decorate—to make more attractive by adding something that is beautiful or becoming

gourd—any of a family of tendril-bearing vines (as the cucumber, melon, squash, and pumpkin)

hollowed— removed the inside of (something)

immigrated—came to a country to live there

native— born in a particular place

Pilgrim—one of the English colonists who founded the first permanent settlement in New England at Plymouth in 1620

pottage— a thick soup of vegetables and often meat

pulp— the soft juicy or fleshy part of a fruit or vegetable

pumpkin—the usually round orange fruit of a vine of the gourd family widely used as food

regatta— a race or a series of races between boats

settler—a person who settles in a new region

undoon (undone)— **defeated** or **destroyed**

tradition— a way of thinking, behaving, or doing something that has been used by the people in a particular group, family, society, etc., for a long time

trolling motor—a motor used in a fishing boat

vegetable—a leafy plant (as the cabbage, bean, or potato) usually without woody tissue grown for an edible part that is usually eaten as part of a meal