

How to Cook **Pumpkin or Winter Squash** 3 Easy Methods

by [Laurie Neverman](#) • originally posted in 2017, updated November 7, 2020



A quick guide for anyone tackling pumpkin cooking for the first time. Sure, it's easy to pop open a can of pumpkin from the store, but cooking pumpkin is also pretty darn easy. Like most fruits and veggies, fresh tastes better! Included here is how to cook pumpkin in the oven, or (under cover) on the stove or in the microwave. Pumpkin and most other winter squash can be used interchangeably in recipes, so the techniques covered here work for both. Need help with when to pick? See "[When to Harvest Pumpkins \(and the Best Ways to Store Them\)](#)". [<https://commonsensehome.com/when-to-harvest-pumpkins/>]

How to Cook Pumpkin or Winter Squash to Bring Out the Best Flavor

Many of us are cutting back on added sugar, so here are a couple tips to bring out out the natural sweetness when cooking your pumpkin:

1. **Use winter squash instead of pumpkin.** Yes, I know this sounds like cheating, but most of them are the same species, just different varieties. Winter squash typically has darker, denser, sweeter flesh. Pie pumpkins are a little better than jack o' lantern pumpkins, but still not as good as squash. I reserve the giant jack o' lanterns pumpkins for livestock feed.
2. **Bake or roast the pumpkin instead of boiling.** The only reason I'd cook a pumpkin on the stove top was if I didn't have an oven. Boiling tends to make the flesh more bland and watery.
3. **If you have watery pumpkin,** line a colander with a flour sack towel or cheesecloth and drain the pumpkin puree for a few hours or overnight. This will get rid of excess liquid and concentrate the flavor of the pumpkin. You can drink the pumpkin water, compost it, or feed it to pets or livestock.

How to Cook Pumpkin in the Oven

Baking pumpkin or squash in the oven is the option I use most often. It's easy to do, and warms up the house in winter. All you have to do is:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C).
2. Cut pumpkin in half and remove seeds and strings.
3. Place pumpkin halves cut side down in [roasting pan](#) and add about 1/2 inch (1.5 cm) of water.
4. Place pan in pre-heated oven and bake for about 45 minutes to one hour, until you can easily pierce the flesh with a fork.
5. Remove from oven and let cool enough to handle. Scrape pumpkin out of skin and mash or puree for use in recipes.

Notes:

- If your pumpkin is a high moisture type (most orange skinned pumpkins), you can probably skip the water in the bottom of the pan.
- Because I cook mostly squash with drier flesh, if I don't add a little water, they will scorch a bit. Placing the pumpkin cut side down traps steam inside the fruit, speeding up cooking time and cooking it more evenly.
- Cutting up the Squash: Andrea Chesman notes in “The Garden Fresh Vegetable Cookbook”: “Most recipes call for cutting winter squash into pieces. Some winter squash, like blue Hubbard, require a heavy cleaver (or ax) to do the job, while others, such as delicata, have skins that are easily cut or even edible. Butternut can be peeled with a swivel-bladed vegetable peeler. For a very hard squash, the best thing to do is drop it on a concrete floor or paved driveway. Another way is in the microwave. Place the whole squash in the microwave and cook on high for 2 minutes. Allow the squash to stand for several minutes, then cut in half for further cooking. After cutting the squash, remove the fibers and seeds.”
- Can you put a whole pumpkin in the oven? Yes, you can cook pumpkin whole. Just cook it a little longer. I'd rather remove the pumpkin guts in the beginning than fish them out of mushy cooked pumpkin at the end of baking, but to each their own. Make sure you poke a few ventilation holes in your pumpkin if you cook it whole, to eliminate any chance of having a blowout. When finished cooking, the pumpkin may start to cave in. A fork should easily penetrate the flesh.
- How to Turn your Cooked Pumpkin into Puree for Pumpkin Pie and other Recipes: I usually scoop the cooked pumpkin into the food processor and puree until well blended. You can also use a blender, a stick blender or even a potato masher. Finished pumpkin puree should be smooth and creamy. Sometimes winter squash is so dry that it doesn't get creamy, and you to add a little bit of water. Another option is to mix half pumpkin and half squash.
- **YIELD:** How Much Puree Does One Pumpkin Make?
1 pie pumpkin (around 6 pounds) = 2 cups cooked and strained puree
A similar size winter squash will typically yield a little more puree. Pumpkin (squash) puree freezes well. I like to cook up a big squash (or several smaller ones), puree them all, and freeze the puree in portion sizes for the recipes that I use most. You can also store puree in the refrigerator for about a week.

How to Cook Pumpkin on the Stove

If you don't have access to an oven, you can cook pumpkin on the stove top.

1. Cut pumpkin in half and remove seeds and strings.
2. Cut pumpkin into chunks and peel.
3. Place pumpkin chunks in a large saucepan or stockpot and fill with enough water to cover bottom of pan/pot.
4. Cook pumpkin on low for about 25-30 minutes, stirring occasionally, until soft. You may also mash the pumpkin right in the pan and cook off excess moisture.
5. Strain to drain off excess liquid if needed, cool and puree.

How to Cook Pumpkin in the Microwave

I'm not much of a microwave cooker myself, but I know some folks use them for everything. The drill for microwaving pumpkin is similar to other cooking methods.

1. Cut pumpkin in half and clean out the pumpkin guts.
2. Place cut pumpkin in a [microwave safe cooking dish](#) with about an inch of water in the bottom.
3. Cover and cook pumpkin in microwave on high for 15 minutes. Test tenderness. Microwave in 5 minute intervals until pumpkin tests done.
4. Remove from oven, cool, scoop out flesh and puree.

Some of our favorite pumpkin recipes:

- [Pumpkin Spice Waffles with Maple Cinnamon Whipped Cream](https://commonsensehome.com/pumpkin-spice-waffles/)
<https://commonsensehome.com/pumpkin-spice-waffles/>
- [Pumpkin Fruit Leather – Tastes Like Portable Pumpkin Pie](https://commonsensehome.com/pumpkin-fruit-leather/)
<https://commonsensehome.com/pumpkin-fruit-leather/>
- [Soft Pumpkin Oatmeal Cookies with Cranberries and Walnuts](https://commonsensehome.com/pumpkin-oatmeal-cookies/)
<https://commonsensehome.com/pumpkin-oatmeal-cookies/>
- [Easy Pumpkin Pie with Graham Cracker Crust](https://commonsensehome.com/pumpkin-pie-recipe/)
<https://commonsensehome.com/pumpkin-pie-recipe/>
- [Mom's Best Pumpkin Bars](https://commonsensehome.com/pumpkin-bars/)
<https://commonsensehome.com/pumpkin-bars/>
- [Pumpkin Scones](https://commonsensehome.com/pumpkin-scones/)
<https://commonsensehome.com/pumpkin-scones/>
- [Maple Sweetened Pumpkin Pie](https://commonsensehome.com/pumpkin-pie-recipe/)
<https://commonsensehome.com/pumpkin-pie-recipe/>
- [Pumpkin Muffins with Cream Cheese Filling](https://commonsensehome.com/pumpkin-muffins/)
<https://commonsensehome.com/pumpkin-muffins/>
- [Pumpkin Wine](https://commonsensehome.com/how-to-make-pumpkin-wine/)
<https://commonsensehome.com/how-to-make-pumpkin-wine/>
- [Squaffles \(Pumpkin or Winter Squash Waffles\) with Maple Cinnamon Whipped Cream](https://commonsensehome.com/pumpkin-waffles/)
<https://commonsensehome.com/pumpkin-waffles/>