

Fruit of the Month

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10/29/2010

Yes Pumpkins are fruit and the Irish brought the tradition of the Jack O' Lantern to America. But, the original Jack O' Lantern was not a pumpkin. The Jack O' Lantern legend goes back hundreds of years in Irish History. As the story goes, Stingy Jack was a miserable, old drunk who liked to play tricks on everyone: family, friends, his mother and even the Devil himself. One day, he tricked the Devil into climbing up an apple tree. Once the Devil climbed up the apple tree, Stingy Jack hurriedly placed crosses around the trunk of the tree. The Devil was then unable to get down the tree. Stingy Jack made the Devil promise him not to take his soul when he died. Once the devil promised not to take his soul, Stingy Jack removed the crosses and let the Devil down. Many years later, when Jack finally died, he went to the pearly gates of Heaven and was told by Saint Peter that he was too mean and too cruel and had led a miserable and worthless life on earth. He was not allowed to enter heaven. He then went down to Hell and the Devil. The Devil kept his promise and would not allow him to enter Hell. Now Jack was scared and had nowhere to go but to wander about forever in the darkness between heaven and hell. He asked the Devil how he could leave as there was no light. The Devil tossed him an ember from the flames of Hell to help him light his way. Jack placed the ember in a hollowed out Turnip, one of his favorite foods which he always carried around with him whenever he could steal one. From that day onward, Stingy Jack roamed the earth without a resting place, lighting his way as he went with his "Jack O' Lantern".

On all Hallows eve, the Irish hollowed out Turnips, rutabagas, gourds, potatoes and beets. They placed a light in them to ward off evil spirits and keep Stingy Jack away. These were the original Jack O' Lanterns. In the 1800's a couple of waves of Irish immigrants came to America. The Irish immigrants quickly discovered that Pumpkins were bigger and easier to carve out. So they used pumpkins for Jack O' Lanterns.

The most popular use of pumpkins is for decoration as jack-o-lanterns. When selecting a pumpkin for cooking, the best selection is a "pie pumpkin" or "sweet pumpkin." These are smaller than the large jack-o-lantern pumpkins and the flesh is sweeter and less watery. However, you can substitute the jack-o-lantern variety with fairly good results. Look for a pumpkin with 1 to 2 inches of stem left. If stem is cut down too low the pumpkin will decay quickly or may be decaying at the time of purchase. Avoid pumpkins with blemishes and soft spots. It should be heavy, shape is unimportant. A lopsided pumpkin is not necessarily a bad pumpkin.

The pumpkin is a warm season plant that can be grown throughout much of the United States. Besides being used as Jack-O'-Lanterns at Halloween, pumpkins are used to make pumpkin butter, pies, custard, bread, cookies and soup. Native Americans called pumpkins "isqoutum squash." Pumpkins contain potassium and Vitamin A. Pumpkins are 90 percent water. Pumpkins originated in Central America.

Total U.S. pumpkin production in 2008 in major pumpkin producing states was valued at \$141 million. Total production of pumpkins by major

pumpkin-producing states in 2008: 1.1 billion pounds. Pumpkins range in size from less than a pound to over 1,000 pounds. The "Autumn Gold" variety has been "judged the best" by horticultural experts across North America.

The University of Wyoming and the United States Department of Agriculture, Sheridan county Office cooperate.