



Sweet Sugar Pumpkin: Autumn's Healthy Delight

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Introduction and Background

- Sweet sugar pumpkins, also known as pie pumpkins, are small, round varieties cultivated specifically for cooking and baking.
- They are nutrient-dense, offering a rich source of beta-carotene, fiber, potassium, and antioxidants (Batool et al., 2022).
- Due to their smooth texture and natural sweetness, they are commonly used in pies, soups, and purees (USDA SNAP-Ed, 2025).
- Increased interest in seasonal and local produce has led to a resurgence in sweet sugar pumpkin farming, particularly in fall markets.

Health Benefits and Nutritional Value

- **Beta-Carotene:** Converts to vitamin A, supporting eye health and immune function.
- **Dietary Fiber:** Aids digestion and promotes satiety.
- **Healthy Fat:** Seeds have a high content of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fatty acids (Batool et al., 2022).
- **Potassium:** Helps regulate blood pressure and fluid balance (Mayo Clinic, 2024).
- **Vitamin C:** Boosts immunity and acts as an antioxidant (USDA SNAP-Ed, 2025).



Cooking Tips

- Make a perfect pumpkin pie with a smooth texture and natural sweetness.
- Blend roasted pumpkin into smoothies.
- Bake homemade pumpkin bread or muffins.
- Use pumpkin puree as a base for soups and sauces.
- Replace butter with pumpkin puree in recipes for a healthy twist.

Cultivation in Kentucky

- Grows well in Kentucky's warm, temperate climate.
- Direct-seed outdoors from late May to early June after last frost (UK, 2021). Seeds need a soil temperature above 70°F to germinate (Wilson & Barickman, 2025).
- Matures in 90–100 days (depending on variety); harvest occurs in September or October (UK, 2021).

Current Trends in Production

- **Heirloom Varieties:** Gaining popularity for flavor and appearance.
- **Organic Farming:** Reduced pesticide use appeals to health-conscious consumers.
- **Seasonal Farmers Markets:** A growing venue for local pumpkin sales for fresh consumption and value-added products (e.g. baked goods) (USDA-NIFA, 2001).
- **Edible Landscaping:** Home gardeners and small farmers increasingly integrate sugar pumpkins.

Fun Facts About Sweet Sugar Pumpkin

- **Fruit by Nature:** A sweet sugar pumpkin is considered a fruit. Pumpkins grow from a flower on a vine and contain seeds, which makes them fruits (Texas A&M, 2023).
- **Edible Skin:** When roasted, the skin becomes soft and edible—no peeling required!
- **Compact & Convenient:** Unlike large carving pumpkins, sweet sugar pumpkins are easy to handle and store in small spaces.
- **Rich in Antioxidants:** Their deep orange color comes from beta-carotene, a powerful antioxidant that supports eye and skin health (Batool et al., 2022).
- **Pollinator-Friendly:** Their large yellow flowers attract bees and help support pollinators. It is essential to protect pollinators by limiting pesticide application.
- **Long Shelf Life:** When stored in a cool (50-55°F), dry place (humidity 50-75%), whole sugar pumpkins can last 2–3 months after harvest (Wilson & Barickman, 2025).

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Growing Tips, Care, & Maintenance

- Crops require full sun and well-drained, fertile soil. Incorporate organic matter into the soil and build high rows to help with drainage.
- Black plastic mulch is beneficial for weed control, and it conserves moisture, accelerates plant growth, and reduces fruit rots.
- Seeds need to be planted 1–1.5 inches deep. Space hills 2–5 feet apart within the row with 4–8 feet between the rows, depending on variety.
- In general, apply 4–6 pounds of a complete fertilizer per 100 feet of row 2 weeks before planting. Be careful not to over-fertilize and keep fertilizer off the leaves.
- Sufficient watering is important. Drip irrigation uses less water, reduces disease, and applies water only at the roots.
- Pumpkins are harvested when fully mature, when skin is darkened and developed to the proper color for that variety.
- Squash vine borers, squash bugs, and spider mites are the most common insects that affect pumpkins. The best pest control is a regular, scheduled spray program when necessary.
- Grow pumpkin varieties that have disease and virus resistance to prevent these conditions.



A slice of fall: sweet sugar pumpkin pie.