

How to Jack-'-Lantern

Tips and tricks to slicing and dicing your way to pumpkin perfection without losing a finger

By MELISSA PANTANO

The Battalion

When I was a kid, my mom would come home with a pumpkin from the grocery store when the first signs of fall arrived. My sister and I would spend about a week worshipping the orange orb, constantly begging to know when we would be allowed to gut and carve the taunting fruit.

Even today, I get a kind of warm, fuzzy feeling whenever I pass a fall farmers' market on the side of the road. Something from my youth reaches out and demands that I have a jack-o'-lantern perched on my front porch. Granted, I have almost lost two fingers in the last year and my pumpkins attract every fruit fly in College Station, but Halloween is not the same without a grinning-faced pumpkin heralding the way for trick-or-treaters.

Carving a pumpkin yourself is a lot different from watching Dad wrestle with the kitchen knife as you wait impatiently to play with the goo. But fear not, unsure carvers, these simple tips will ensure a somewhat safe and sane carving ritual.



First things first

Pumpkins have been sitting in dirt for months. Before you bring the pumpkin in to be carved, be sure to wash your hands and wipe the pumpkin with a damp cloth. This gets all the clumpy dirt off the skin and insures that a fanatical roommate or mother does not have a fit about "stuff" on the carpet.

Pick your poison

The most important thing about carving anything with a big knife is safety. When choosing the correct knife for your endeavor, the most important thing is to pick a knife with a sharp tip and serrated blade. Most stores sell pumpkin-carving kits that include great little knives to get the job done painlessly and easily. But like most students, I opt to save the five bucks and put myself in the imminent danger of losing a digit.



Mark your territory

So, you have the orange sphere sitting in front



of you. The next step is to plan your decorating. The best tool for drawing on pumpkins is a crayon because pencils dent and pens do not wipe off. You want to draw a circle around the stem big enough to fit your hand and most of your forearm through. Then you can proceed to design your organic work of art. Faces are always fun to reflect the ambiance of your home, but there are patterns you can use to impress friends and family. Patterns can be downloaded for free at www.pumpkinmasters.com or bought at your local grocery store.



It's goo time

Once your masterpiece is drawn out, it is time to cut the top off your pumpkin. Once the top is cut off, it is time to scrape out the goo. My scraping utensil of choice is a big tablespoon out of the kitchen. After the wonderful goo is out of the pumpkin, make sure you scrape the bottom with the spoon or some other hard-edged utensil. This thwarts fruit flies and keeps the pumpkin from rotting before its time.

Slice and dice

Now that your pumpkin is gutted and you have washed your hands to get all of the clingy innards off your limbs, it is time to call upon your artistic instincts. The most important thing about carving the actual design is to not put your free hand inside the pumpkin while carving. Keep your grip on the edge of the top and hold on tight. This prevents you from slicing your hand open, and also allows for an overall better grip.



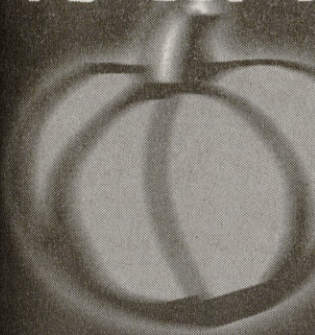
Fish for compliments

After your design is carved, you can slap the top back on the pumpkin and put it outside for the world to see. A small tea candle can be inserted in the pumpkin to light up your project, but be sure it is securely placed in the middle so nothing lights on fire. If fire is of severe concern, you may choose to use a glowstick, which can be found at any local grocery store.

(Left) Kristin Kuhlman, a sophomore psychology major carves a pumpkin.
BRADLEY ATCHISON/THE BATTALION

Roasted Pumpkin Seeds

Now that you are done with your jack-o'-lantern masterpiece, you can cook the seeds for a delicious treat!



1. Wash the pumpkin seeds. This is easiest to do right after the carving. Just pick the seeds out of the goo and run hot water over them.
2. Let the seeds dry overnight.
3. Coat the seeds in vegetable oil, salt lightly and bake at 350 degrees until they are brown and crispy. This usually only takes a few minutes, so make sure that you watch them closely so that they do not burn. Nothing smells worse than burned pumpkin seeds.

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