

Chow Line

News from the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

Canned pumpkin offers nutrition, convenience

We attended a chili cook-off recently, and one of the entrants said she used canned pumpkin in her recipe. She said pumpkin helps thicken the chili and adds a lot of nutrients. Is pumpkin really that good for you? What else can it be used for?

Pumpkin-eaters can take heart knowing that canned pumpkin packs a lot of nutrition.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Nutrient Database, even though a cup of canned pumpkin is primarily water and contains just 80 calories, it offers more than an entire day's worth of vitamin A, as well as 7 grams of fiber. It's also a very good source of vitamin C, vitamin K, iron and manganese, and is a good source of potassium and many other nutrients.

Interestingly, canned pumpkin — even canned pumpkin labeled “100 percent pumpkin” — can be a mix of pumpkin and other types of winter squash. That's nothing new. Back in 1957, the USDA said the canned product can be prepared from “clean, sound, properly matured, golden fleshed, firm shelled, sweet varieties of either pumpkins and squashes.” But most fans of canned pumpkin don't mind. Some even say on foodie discussion boards that they prefer canned pureed pumpkin to homemade.

It's important to note two things. First, don't mistake canned pumpkin puree for canned pumpkin pie filling, even though you may find them next to each other in the baking supplies aisle at the grocery store. You can doctor up the pumpkin puree with your own recipe to use for pumpkin pie, but pumpkin pie filling is already sodden with added sugar, boosting the calorie count to 280 per cup.



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Also, look for low- or no-sodium types of canned pumpkin. You'll slash the sodium content in one cup of pumpkin from a whopping 590 milligrams to a more-than-acceptable 10 milligrams.

As for ideas on how to use pumpkin, you can search almost any recipe database to spark your creativity. One such site, often overlooked, is the USDA's “What's Cooking” website at whatscooking.fns.usda.gov. Search for “pumpkin” and the recipes that result include muffins, pancakes, cookies and other treats, as well as dishes such as:

- Pumpkin Soup, which includes a bit of beef roast and maple syrup, black pepper and cinnamon for flavor.
- Pumpkin Peanut Butter Sandwich, which is just what it sounds like. Blend pumpkin with peanut butter before spreading on bread, and add a sliced banana.
- Pumpkin and White Bean Soup, which combines pureed canned white beans and apple juice with pumpkin, onion and spices for a hearty dish.
- Pumpkin Smoothie, which uses chilled canned pumpkin with evaporated low-fat milk, orange juice, banana, light brown sugar, ice cubes and cinnamon.
- Pumpkin Mac and Cheese, which uses pumpkin puree to boost the nutrition in this traditional comfort food.

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Editor: This column was reviewed by Carolyn Gunther, Ohio State University Extension specialist in Community Nutrition Education.

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