



Jack-o'-lanterns are not food

We grew pumpkins for cooking in our garden this year, and we plan to carve a few as small jack-o'-lanterns. If I spray the interior of the pumpkins with bleach and use an electric candle, can I still use them for cooking?

It's not a good idea. Generally, perishable food — which is what your pumpkins will be once you carve them — shouldn't be left at room temperature for more than two hours.

And actually, "room temperature" is not quite accurate. Not to use a scary term or anything, but you want perishable food in the "danger zone" of 40 degrees to 140 degrees F for no longer than two hours. After that amount of time, any cells of bacteria lurking around have too much of an opportunity to multiply to illness-causing levels.

It's possible — unlikely, but possible — that you might carve the pumpkins in advance, store them in the refrigerator until it's time for trick-or-treating, and then chill them again immediately afterward. (This assumes your Beggars Night is just two hours long.) In this case, it would probably be possible to use the pumpkins for cooking. At least, it would satisfy the two-hour rule. But the fact that you say you want to use bleach on the pumpkins indicates that you want to carve them and let them sit out for a while, maybe even a day or two. If you

decide to eat the pumpkins after that amount of time, no preservative, not bleach or anything else, will protect you from the kinds of ghouls that could creep into your gut as a result. Besides, although it is great for hard surfaces like countertops, bleach does not disinfect foods. Moreover, bleach is not a food. You shouldn't eat food treated with household bleach.

You'll probably get a lot more enjoyment from your fall festivities if you just go out and buy a pumpkin made for carving. Good varieties of "eating" pumpkins have thicker, denser flesh, which makes them more difficult to carve anyway.

Another food safety guideline for the season: Make sure any apple cider you buy is pasteurized. Most of it is these days, but that wasn't always the case. Until the 1990s, apple cider's high acidity was thought to protect it from most contaminants. But then there were several outbreaks traced to cider contaminated with *E. coli* O157:H7 and the parasite *Cryptosporidium*, and regulations changed.

Be careful. In Ohio, cider that's packaged and sold directly to the consumer from the premises where it's made isn't necessarily pasteurized. If not, it will have a warning label — pay heed.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University's College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

OHIO AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH
AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Oct. 25, 2013

By Martha Filipic

614-292-9833

filipic.3@osu.edu

Editor:

This column was reviewed by Jeff LeJeune, food safety researcher for the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center and Ohio State University Extension, the research and outreach arms of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences.

**Communications and Technology
Strategic Communications**
2021 Coffey Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1044
614-292-2011

208 Research Services
Building
1680 Madison Ave.
Wooster, OH 44691-4096
330-263-3780

Ohio State University Extension embraces human diversity and is committed to ensuring that all research and related educational programs are available to clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to age, ancestry, color, disability, gender identity or expression, genetic information, HIV/AIDS status, military status, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status. This statement is in accordance with United States Civil Rights Laws and the USDA. *Keith L. Smith, Associate Vice President for Agricultural Administration; Associate Dean, College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences; Director, Ohio State University Extension; and Gist Chair in Extension Education and Leadership. For Deaf and Hard of Hearing, please contact Ohio State University Extension using your preferred communication (e-mail, relay services, or video relay services). Phone 1-800-750-0750 between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. EST Monday through Friday. Inform the operator to dial 614-292-6181.*