

Pumpkins Add Special Touch to Dinner Table

The richness and bounty of the fall harvest season usually culminates at our yearly Thanksgiving Day feasts.

If you are preparing dinner for family and friends, and you are looking for some new twists on the standard cooking, baking, and decorating themes, read on and learn how to go out on a tangent with your harvested pumpkins, squash, and Indian corn.

Set a table that will make a lasting impression with family, friends, and next door neighbors!

Field pumpkins, pie pumpkins (which are smaller with finer-grained flesh and a sweeter, more delicate flavor than field pumpkins), and Jack-Be-Little mini-pumpkins can all be used to not only decorate your dinner table, but also to hold delicious side dishes. The effect is not only unique, but also very rich and colorful!

- Choose field or pie pumpkins that have a nice shape and that "sit" well. Cut the tops off about one inch below the stem. Scrape the seeds and stringy pulp out with a spoon. Place the cut side down on a foil-lined jelly roll pan if you want to make a soup tureen. Bake for one hour or until tender at 350°F. The baking time will depend on the shape and thickness of the shell. It should be tender, but not so soft that the shell starts to collapse. After baking, set the pumpkin on a serving dish and fill with hot soup. Carefully ladle soup out of pumpkin tureen into bowls.
- Another variation on this theme is to cut the top off a pie pumpkin, but this time cut about 2 inches below the stem. Scrape out the seeds and stringy pulp with a spoon. Then mix olive oil and butter in a small cup and lightly brush some inside the pumpkin. Sprinkle with ¼ tsp. of salt. Place cut side down at one end of a jelly roll pan. Place 2 large, sliced carrots, 4 halved and sliced small red potatoes, 1 Golden Delicious apple (halved, cored, and cut into 12 slices), 1 diced, medium onion, and 3 thinly sliced cloves of garlic at the other end of the pan. Drizzle with a little olive oil/butter mixture, and then sprinkle with salt, thyme, and pepper.

Toss to coat and then spread out and roast for 30 minutes (turning once) at 400°F. Increase oven temperature to 450° and turn pumpkin over. Continue roasting for 15 minutes or until vegetables and pumpkin are tender (turn vegetables once during this time). Fill pumpkin with roasted fall vegetables and serve!

- Roasted Jack-Be-Little pumpkins make adorable, tasty additions to each Thanksgiving Day plate. Even the kids will want one!

Heat the oven to 400°. Cut the tops off of your mini-pumpkins. Scrape out the seeds and stringy pulp with a spoon. Lightly brush the pumpkin inside and out with melted butter, and then sprinkle with salt, pepper,

and thyme or other herb. Roast 30 to 40 minutes on a baking dish or jelly roll pan until tender. Serve alone or stuffed with mashed potatoes.

- As far as table decorations go, scoop out a field pumpkin and place a small pot of water inside. Fill the pumpkin with long-stemmed cut flowers or place a potted mum plant inside.
- To continue the theme, scoop out small mini-pumpkins and place votive candles inside. Place one mini-pumpkin at each person's spot and enjoy the flickering effect, especially if you're serving an evening dinner.
- A small raffia bow and small dried flowers can also be added with a hot glue gun to the top of small, uncut mini-pumpkins, or the flowers can be placed as a bouquet into a hollowed out shell. Your guests will be able to take the pumpkin that decorated their eating spot at the dinner table home with them as a memento of the occasion.
- And if you don't know what to do with extra ears of mini Indian corn, wrap three shucked ears length-wise (two on the bottom forming a base and one on top) with a longer length of raffia. Tie a bow to hold ears in place, and use a hot glue gun to add colorful dried flowers at the top near the tied bow. Add these decorated Indian corn bundles to each place setting.