

News Article

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It's Pumpkin Time

Whether you enjoy growing, carving, or eating pumpkins, they are some of the most popular vegetables grown and enjoyed by Indiana residents. And, it seems that each fall we are inundated with pumpkin-flavored everything. Depending on your own tastes, maybe that's a good thing, or a bad thing.

Dr. Rosie Lerner, Purdue consumer horticulture specialist, said, "Pumpkins are available in several sizes: small (4-6 pounds), for cooking and pies; medium (8-15 pounds) and large (15-25 pounds), for cooking and jack-o'-lanterns; and jumbo (50-100 pounds), for showing at fairs and exhibits." She added that there are also naked seeded or hull-less cultivars for roasting seed. Bush and semi-vining cultivars are used for small gardens.

Lerner said pumpkins should be harvested when they have a deep, solid color and the rind is hard. The vines will usually be dying back at this time. Cover during a light frost and avoid leaving pumpkins out during a hard frost to prevent softening.

Dr. Liz Maynard, Purdue commercial vegetable crop specialist, recently offered the following purchasing tips for consumers looking to take advantage of the state's fall pumpkin harvest:

- * Choose pumpkins that are fully mature, meaning the fruit is completely orange and the rind is tough.
- * Make sure the pumpkin is solid and has no soft spots or unhealed wounds in the rind.
- * Select a pumpkin with a healthy stem that is firmly attached. The stem should be solid, not shriveled. Check that the stem is attached by inspecting it - not by lifting the pumpkin by the stem.
- * For jack-o'-lanterns, avoid hard-shell pumpkin varieties because they are much harder to carve.

Many consumers look for pumpkins not to carve, but to eat.

"If the pumpkin will be used for eating, I would recommend selecting a pie pumpkin and, ideally, talking with the producer to find out whether or not it is a variety known to be good for eating," Maynard said.

Local residents have several options for buying pumpkins. Some local producers and roadside stands have pumpkins available, along with many of your favorite garden centers and retail outlets.

For the competitors out there, our own Indiana State Fair has an annual giant pumpkin contest, featuring pumpkins in excess of 200 pounds, and some that have eclipsed 1000 pounds.

According to the Indiana Pumpkin Growers Association, the current all-time state record is from a Marion, IN grower in 2019 with an Atlantic Giant Pumpkin at 1,781 pounds.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's 2017 Ag Census, Indiana's farmers grew 5,330 acres of pumpkins on 432 farms, mostly for fresh market. This is up from the 2012 Census, when Indiana farmers grew 3,518 acres of pumpkins on 469 farms.

In 2018, Indiana was the 4th leading state in production of all pumpkins, and comprised 8.4% of all pumpkins grown in the U.S. at a value of \$16,971,000.

Find more information on pumpkins at www.edustore.purdue.edu.