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### **Post Halloween Pumpkins**

Post Halloween madness, most parents I'm sure don't want to see another pumpkin. But perhaps we should stop to consider the uses for the pumpkin beyond the purely decorative.

The Jack-O-Lantern, an iconic symbol of Halloween, actually originates in Irish folklore. It commemorates Jack, a shifty Irish villain, so wicked that neither God nor the Devil wanted him. Rejected by Heaven and Hell, Jack was doomed to wander the earth endlessly for a resting place, his only source of warmth a candle in a carved out turnip. Irish immigrants to America during the potato famine, found pumpkins to be a perfect substitute for turnips, which were harder to find.

The pumpkin is in fact a fruit and has been grown in North America for five thousand years. It is from the gourd family which includes cucumbers, gherkins and melons. It has a high water content and is very resilient.

Orange-fleshed pumpkins contain high levels of carotenoids, which studies suggest may help to prevent certain types of cancer-including cancer of the colon-as well as heart disease. Pumpkins are also rich in antioxidant Vitamin C, which is needed for efficient immune system function. This will help fight colds and improve general overall resistance to disease. In addition, pumpkins contain fibre, which will help lower cholesterol. Fibre will also improve digestion by encouraging the elimination of waste.

Gillian McKeith I think quadrupled sales of pumpkin seeds across Ireland and the UK when she started promoting it as an aid to male sexual potency. Pumpkin seeds are very rich in zinc and iron which will have a beneficial effect on both male and female libido. They also contain omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids which promote healthy skin, digestion and heart health. Along with the essential fatty acids, B vitamins in pumpkin seeds offset stress and support brain and nervous system health. Pumpkin seeds are also great for the immune system, a good source of protein and help regulate blood sugar levels.

If you can find little pumpkins, slice in half and scoop out the seeds. Fill with your choice of filling, wrap in foil and bake in the oven at 180°C till just tender. Children in particular love this as it looks so cute. My favourite fillings are wilted spinach and feta cheese, sauteed leeks or sweetcorn and cheese sauce. There is always of course pumpkin soup, but do spice it up with cinnamon or cumin. Pumpkin seeds are great toasted and sprinkled over salads, porridge or muesli. Toast with a little soy sauce for a savoury snack.