

## JACK-O-LANTERN

It just wouldn't be Halloween without a Jack-O-Lantern! There are no rules for selecting a Halloween pumpkin. Generally, the pumpkin should not be too large or heavy to carry. On the other hand, if the pumpkin is too small it may not retain its shape when a burning candle is placed inside. The heat tends to cause the flesh to shrivel, particularly around the edges of the carving.

Most people prefer round pumpkins, but this is not essential. Depending upon the type of face you intend to create, irregular shapes can be a real asset. The only necessity is that the pumpkin sits securely upon its base. If it is wobbly, it may become a fire hazard. Traditionally pumpkins are orange although this can vary from deep orange to yellow. Bicolor orange and green pumpkins are sometimes seen but these may be more difficult to carve and clean if they are not totally ripe. There is also the Ghost pumpkin variety, which is almost white. The ghost pumpkin can also be eaten.

Carve pumpkins just a few days before Halloween to prevent deterioration. The knife work is best left to parents although children can help scoop out the fibrous interior and seeds. This is messy work so spread plenty of papers around first. When finished, you can save the seeds for roasting later if desired.

If you intend to eat the pumpkins, avoid the very large, ornamental ones and select a smaller variety grown especially for its eating quality. Do not carve a Halloween pumpkin if it is going to double as a pumpkin pie after Halloween. Any cuts into the skin, as well as from the candle inside, causes rapid dehydration and deterioration. Paint a face on the pumpkin with poster paints or cut a face out of colored paper or felt and tape it on the pumpkin instead.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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