

Pumpkins are more than just an eyeful

Continued from Page 1

"This year we're using canned pumpkin," said Ken, a former teacher who got his start in the food business by baking tarts and bread for the pumpkin festival several years ago.

"The honey used as a sweetener is superior to sugar and a more important ingredient than fresh pumpkin," he said.

In addition to honey, the tart features a whole-wheat crust.

Near Upland Hills is the Middleton Berry Farm, on Stoney Creek Road in Oxford, which advertises a pumpkin harvest and has an ample fruit stand to boot.

If there's a difference between fresh pureed pumpkin and solid-pumpkin, even some professional chefs don't taste the difference.

"Pumpkin alone is pretty bland. It's the spices that add flavor," said Lorrie Leonard, owner of Lorrie's Confectionary Yours in the Laurel Commons shopping center in Livonia.

LEONARD'S PASTRY shop offers several mouthwatering confections, including pumpkin cheesecake sold whole in three sizes or by the slice. The cheesecakes are made with canned solid-pumpkin.

"Other than the work involved (with fresh), I don't see the difference," said Leonard, who admitted to pureeing fresh pumpkin just once.

"I think it's something that families might like to do in the fall, like dipping apples in caramel," she said.

"But as long as you're dealing with a good manufacturer, like Libby's or Stokely's, the canned is just as good."

To enhance flavors, an easier way than pureeing fresh pumpkin would be to use canned pumpkin, but spice the recipe with fresh ground cinnamon, she suggested.

Those who used fresh pumpkin, though, can make use of the seeds as well as pulp. From the culinary program of Schoolcraft Community College comes this suggestion for gourmet, roasted pumpkin seeds.

Clean and soak the seeds overnight in four cups of water 1/4 cup of salt, and a cup each of molasses, sherry and/or brandy. Drain and lightly salt seeds again. Bake in a 350-degree oven until golden brown.

Pumpkin recipes range from soup to mousse

Continued from Page 1

3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
2 teaspoons basil
2 teaspoons marjoram
salt and pepper
1 medium pumpkin
2 tablespoons butter

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Cook rice. Sauté ground meat, green pepper, onions and bay leaf together until all traces of red are gone from meat. Drain off fat, remove bay leaf.

In large bowl, mix meat, rice, spices, and salt and pepper. Add more spices, if desired. Remove top from pumpkin so that it can be replaced as a lid. Remove seeds and fibrous bits. Rub the inside of the pumpkin with butter, sprinkle with salt and pepper. Pack meat and rice mixture into pumpkin, replace top, and bake until you can pierce the side of the pumpkin with a fork (usually an hour, but could vary). To serve, slice down. Serves 10.

PUMPKIN MOUSSE

8 eggs
1/4 cup sugar
2 tablespoons unflavored gelatin
3 cups pureed pumpkin
2 tablespoons cinnamon
1 1/2 teaspoon freshly grated ginger
1 teaspoon nutmeg
2 tablespoons allspice
2 cups heavy cream
candied ginger as garnish

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Thermometers tell all

AP — When it's hot, it's hot — or maybe it's not hot enough. For best cooking results, use a thermometer to check food temperatures. There are different kinds to serve different cooking needs.

CANDY

Both temperature and degree of doneness (soft ball, hard crack) are marked on a candy thermometer. Some include deep-frying markings as well.

Test your candy thermometer for accuracy before each use by submerging the tip in boiling water. If the thermometer registers above or below 212 degrees, add or subtract the same number of degrees from the recipe temperature and cook to that temperature. For example, if the thermometer reads 214 degrees, cook the candy 2 degrees higher than the recipe states. If it reads 209 degrees, cook candy to a temperature 5 degrees lower than your recipe requires.

MEAT

Unless you like surprises when you carve a roast, use a meat thermometer to be sure the meat is cooked to the doneness you prefer. This thermometer indicates the temperature for different meats and their levels of doneness. Some thermometers are inserted in the center of the largest muscle of the meat before cooking; others plug into the meat for just a moment for an instant reading.

OVEN HEAT

When cakes or cookies burn, it may be a signal that the oven temperature is running higher than the setting. Use an oven thermometer to verify.

Test your candy thermometer for accuracy before each use by submerging the tip in boiling water.

REFRIGERATOR

Check your refrigerator and freezer temperature with a refrigerator thermometer. Your refrigerator should be set at about 40 degrees and the temperature in your freezer should be below zero.

MICROWAVE

Besides the temperature probe that comes with many microwave ovens, you can choose from several different microwave-safe thermometers. Do not use regular oven, candy or meat thermometers in a microwave oven.

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