

Nutrition Notables

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Special points of interest:

- Discover how Halloween evolved into the holiday that we celebrate today!
- Learn how to toast your pumpkin seeds!
- Enjoy less sugar at Halloween!

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Halloween History

Ever wonder how a Celtic festival for spirits became the Halloween that we celebrate today with the emphasis on pumpkins, apples and candy? Seemed a little odd to me so, I decided to learn more. So here's the what I learned.

Let's start with the apples. Originally Halloween was the Celtic festival of Samhain (sow-in). They celebrated it on the first day of November. When the Romans conquered the Celts, Samhain was combined with two Roman festivals. The first was to honor the passing of the dead and the second was a day to honor Pomona, the Roman goddess of fruit and trees. Her symbol was the apple and "bobbing" for apples was a part of the Roman celebration. It then became a part of the Halloween celebration.

Next, let's explore the history of pumpkin carving. Jack-o-lanterns actually started out as turnips or rutabagas carved to resemble a mythical man in Ireland called "Stingy Jack". Jack was very cheap and kept tricking the Devil. He tricked the Devil into promising to never take his soul. When he died God would not let him into heaven, and the Devil kept his promise and

would not allow him into hell either. He was only willing to give Jack a burning coal from hell to light his way. Jack placed this in a carved out turnip to carry around for eternity. Because of this, he was called from then on "Jack of the Lantern", which was eventually shortened to Jack-o-lantern.

The Irish and Scottish put similar carvings in the window, much like a jack-o-lantern of today. It was intended to scare away "Stingy Jack" and other evil spirits. Originally in the US, pumpkins were carved to celebrate the harvest season. When the Irish began immigrating to the US, the pumpkin started replacing the turnip because it was easier to carve.

Finally, we can't forget trick-or-treating for candy. Surprisingly, it started as a tradition of the poor going door-to-door on Hallowmas (the name the Christians gave to Samhain in an attempt to make it a religious day) offering prayers and songs for the dead in exchange for food. Over time the "beggars" become the town's children instead and the food became sweeter treats. Originally during Samhain, the Celts would dress up like the spir-



Learn how Halloween became a holiday of candy and food!

its to soothe them. This dressing up, or guising as it was called, continued to be done by the beggars. This tradition was brought to America by immigrants during the 19th century. During the late 19th century, Western pioneers' wives started giving kids treats to avoid being pranked. Soon after the phrase "Trick-or-Treat" became a popular saying. So that's how a festival of spirits became the "spired" candy laden celebration we call Halloween today.



Save your pumpkin seeds for a tasty snack!

Recipe Box—Toasted Pumpkin Seeds

If you're like me, you usually carve your Halloween pumpkin and toss the seeds. This year, I plan on toasting the pumpkin seeds. It's pretty easy and you can get as creative as you'd like with spices to flavor them.

First, remove the seeds from pumpkin and take the strings of pumpkin pulp off the seeds. Rinse the seeds. Allow the seeds to air dry for at least 1 to 2 hours.

Coat the seeds with a bit of oil. Olive or canola oil are good choices. Use approximately 1 tablespoon of oil for each 1/2 cup of seeds you have.

Next, season the pumpkin seeds with spices as desired. Good ones to try are garlic powder, cayenne powder, black pepper, Mrs. Dash, chili powder, Mexican style chili lime seasoning, pumpkin pie seasoning, Garam Marsala, Cajun spice mix, and Italian dried herb mix. Mix more than one spice together to get your own personal flavoring mix. If you're not sure what to mix, the internet is a great place to find suggestions for seasoning mixes. If you like your seeds plain, that's fine too.

Place in an even layer on a baking sheet.

Temperature recommendations for toasting pumpkin seeds vary from 250°F to 400°F. The temperature you use is up to you. No matter

what you will need to stir the seeds frequently, but at the higher temperatures you will need to do so more often.

Also the lower the temperature the longer they will take to toast, but they are also less likely to burn. At 250°F, the seeds make take up to an hour to toast and at 400°F they may only take 5 minutes. If you're not sure what temperature to select, 300°F is a good place to start.

At 300°F they will need to cook for at least 15 minutes, but can take up to 45 minutes depending on your oven and how brown you want them. Make sure the oven is pre-heated before you start. Stir the seeds about every 5 to 10 minutes during cooking.

When the seeds are the desired color, remove from the oven. Allow the seeds to cool completely before storing.

The toasted pumpkin seeds can be stored in an airtight container on the counter for 3 months, or in the freezer for up to 1 year.



Halloween can still be fun without all the sugar!

Kid's Korner—Healthier Halloween

Many parents cringe at the idea of trick-or-treating because of the candy. It creates images of their children running around with a sugar buzz for the next several days, while they fill up on candy. So what can we do about this? There's always the option to ration out the candy, but wouldn't it be nice to have a candy-free alternative? The following list is some options for ways to make Halloween less sugary.

Host a Party—Have a Halloween party for your children and their friends instead of trick-or-treating. The kids can bob for apples, have a costume contest and play games for non-food party favors. They can drink hot spiced cider and eat roasted pumpkin seeds (see above).

Non-candy Foods—Instead of candy give your trick-or-treaters other food items such as: string cheese, crystal light packets, cheese and cracker packages, single

serve raisins, cereal bars, sugar-free gum, 100 calorie packs, sugar-free hot chocolate or cider packets, etc.

Non-food Treats—Another option is to give your trick-or-treaters non-food Halloween party favors or small items from the dollar store. You can get pencils, erasers, glow sticks, stickers, crayons, whistles, bottles of bubbles, temporary tattoos, bookmarks, false teeth, just to name a few.

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