



# Devilishly Gourd

*With Halloween just around the corner, Paola Westbeek shares ideas for how to use leftover carved pumpkins to cook with*

Paola Westbeek is a food, wine and travel journalist who has tasted her way through Europe, interviewing chefs, visiting vineyards and reviewing restaurants. Her work has appeared in *FRANCE Magazine* and other publications



ACCORDING TO THE climate change organisation WRAP (Waste and Resource Action Programme), approximately 9.5 million tonnes of food goes to waste every year in the UK. Those staggering numbers are especially disturbing if you consider that nearly three-quarters of that food (6.4 million tonnes) was perfectly suitable for consumption. Curbing food waste would not only reduce global greenhouse gas emissions by roughly ten per cent, but the food that ends up in landfills could potentially feed up to 2 billion people.

With the advent of autumn and Halloween right around the corner, I can't help but think about all of those handsome pumpkins that will mercilessly get discarded after they've served as festive jack-o'-lanterns by our front door or as part of our indoor decor, adding seasonal colour to a mantelpiece or dining room table. With the exception of the rock-hard,

dry and unpleasantly bitter gourds available at a garden centre, most pumpkins (if handled correctly) need not be thrown away and can be used in many delicious dishes, both sweet and savoury.

I would certainly not recommend turning a carved pumpkin that's been sitting outside for days—more than likely serving as an all-you-can-eat buffet for insects and rodents—

speaking, you should bear in mind that the larger pumpkins used as jack-o'-lanterns are quite bland and tend to have a tough, stringy flesh. Opt to roast the flesh instead of boiling it as this imparts more flavour, and be generous when it comes to seasoning. The easiest way to roast a pumpkin is by slicing it in half, scooping out the seeds and baking it at 180°C for approximately

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into soup. However, if you wash the outside of your pumpkins well before carving and only set them out for a few hours on a cold Halloween night, there's no harm in bringing them back in and cooking them up when trick-or-treaters have stopped coming round. It's another story if your pumpkins are uncarved and used indoors. In that case, they will remain in good condition for up to two months, but do check to ensure they are blemish-free and haven't started going soft.

Pumpkins come in all shapes and sizes, and there are hundreds of varieties to choose from, each with its own unique texture and flavour profile. Discovering which works best for your recipes is really a matter of taste, but generally



45 to 90 minutes, depending on its size. Once cooled, simply scoop out the flesh with a spoon, blitz in a food processor until smooth and use in soups, bakes and spreads such as hummus or pumpkin butter.

The most popular pumpkin varieties (among them the Kabocha, Cinderella, Musquee de Provence, Crown Prince and Turban Squash) are beautiful and full of flavour. Their seeds, which are rich in zinc and magnesium, make a wholesome snack or excellent topping for salads when tossed with olive oil, sea salt and roasted at 180°C for 15-20 minutes. Play around with dried herbs and spices to fancy them up. I love adding garlic powder with a dash of smoked Spanish paprika or the deliciously fragrant and spicy

piment d'Espelette; and for a sweet version, swap out the oil for melted butter and toss with cinnamon and maple syrup.

One of the recipes I have on repeat throughout the autumn is my aromatic pumpkin and rice gratin. For two people, start by sautéing a shallot or onion, a red chilli pepper and garlic in a bit of olive oil until soft. Add 400g of diced pumpkin and cook for approximately 5 minutes. Next, tip in 120g of basmati rice and approximately 450ml of hot vegetable stock. Briefly bring to a bubble, then remove from the heat and stir in a few heaping tablespoons of cream; freshly chopped herbs such as parsley, chives or sage; and a few handfuls of sharp, grated cheese. Transfer the mixture to a greased baking dish, finish with a little more cheese and freshly cracked pepper and bake at 180°C for 40 minutes, until the rice is cooked through and the dish is bubbling.

For a super-quick pasta dish, roast 400g of cubed pumpkin, red onion wedges and whole garlic cloves at 200°C for 35 minutes. Once done, squeeze out the garlic and stir everything through pappardelle ribbons along with a swirl of cream, a handful of toasted walnuts, rocket lettuce and a little blue cheese.

Remember to look beyond traditional pies when it comes to using up pumpkin purée. Add it to cakes, cookies and bars instead of butter to cut down on fat (and sugar, for that matter). If you'd rather indulge than abstain, remember that pumpkin pairs brilliantly with dark chocolate and cream cheese, so play around with pumpkin breads with chopped chocolate and pecans, or try pumpkin cheesecake bars with caramel sauce and cupcakes with pumpkin spice and cream cheese icing. You'll be glad those decorative pumpkins were put to good culinary use. ■



## Autumnal Colours

**Chlorophyll is the chemical that makes leaves green and, as it declines, other chemicals take more prominence in the leaves**

**These chemicals include flavonoids, carotenoids and anthocyanins and are responsible for the ambers, reds and yellows of autumn leaves**

**Some of these chemicals give carrots (beta-carotenes) and egg yolks (luteins) their colours**

SOURCE: METOFFICE.GOV.UK

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