

Autumn is the season when pumpkins are ripe for the picking, and thousands of people flock to local farms and roadside vendors to select perfect pumpkins. Many people are unaware of the various ways they can put pumpkins to good use.

- Create a food vessel. Pumpkins can be transformed into bowls to hold soup, punch, fruit, or even dips. Make sure the pumpkin has been cleaned well of its pulp and seeds, as well as the stringy flesh that is inside. Rub the inside walls of the pumpkin with oil to keep them from drying out and caving in, then fill with your food of choice.

- Whip up a facial. Use some pumpkin puree with a little brown sugar and a dash of milk to create a vitamin-rich facial mask.

- Get illuminated. Turn hollowed-out mini pumpkins or gourds into candles. Melt soy wax, beeswax or the gel type of candle wax that can be found at most craft stores. Add a favorite scent and place a wick into the bottom of the pumpkin. Then pour the wax into hallowed-out space and allow it to harden.

- Turn the pumpkin into a flower pot. Fill a hollow pumpkin with soil. There is no need to scrape the pumpkin completely clean because the pulp can be used to help fertilize the potting soil. Plant favorite fall flowers into the festive and earth-friendly flower pot. When the pumpkin shows signs of rotting, simply put the whole thing into a traditional flower pot or bury it directly in the ground.

- Add to compost bins. Pumpkins are rich in zinc, vitamin A and vitamin C, among other nutrients. You can add the discarded pumpkins to your backyard compost bins to further replenish the soil.

- Turn into a billowing cauldron. Instead of a standard jack-o'-lantern, put a glass jar into the carved pumpkin, add dish soap and hot water to the jar and then put in a piece of dry ice. Bubbles and smoke will pour out of the pumpkin to create a spooktacular effect.