

# South Pacific Commission

Community  
Education  
Training Centre



South  
Pacific  
Foods

Leaflet **12**  
1986

## Pumpkin

### A valuable food

Pumpkin is an important food for many Pacific people. It is a very valuable food because most parts of the plant can be eaten and are rich in nutrients. Pumpkin is easy to grow and one plant in the garden can supply pumpkins and green leaves throughout the year.

Everyone should know how to grow, prepare and preserve local foods such as pumpkin. Eating locally grown foods can save money. Pumpkin is a protective food. It helps people stay healthy.

### An easily grown plant



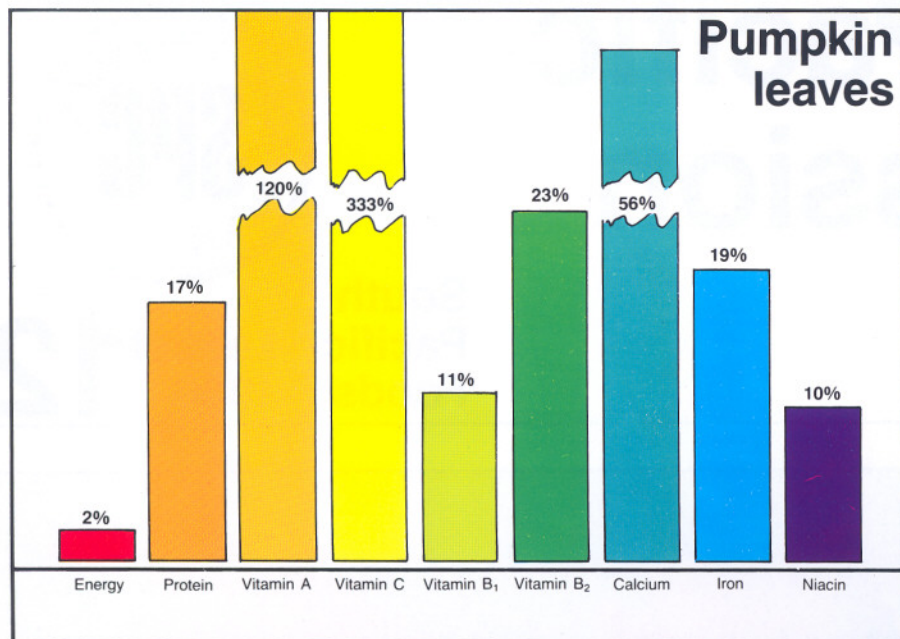
Pumpkins grow on creeping vines and can be grown throughout the Pacific.

Pumpkins belong to the family with the scientific name *Cucurbitaceae*. These creeping vines do not need much looking after once they are planted. They can be grown throughout the Pacific — even on atolls.

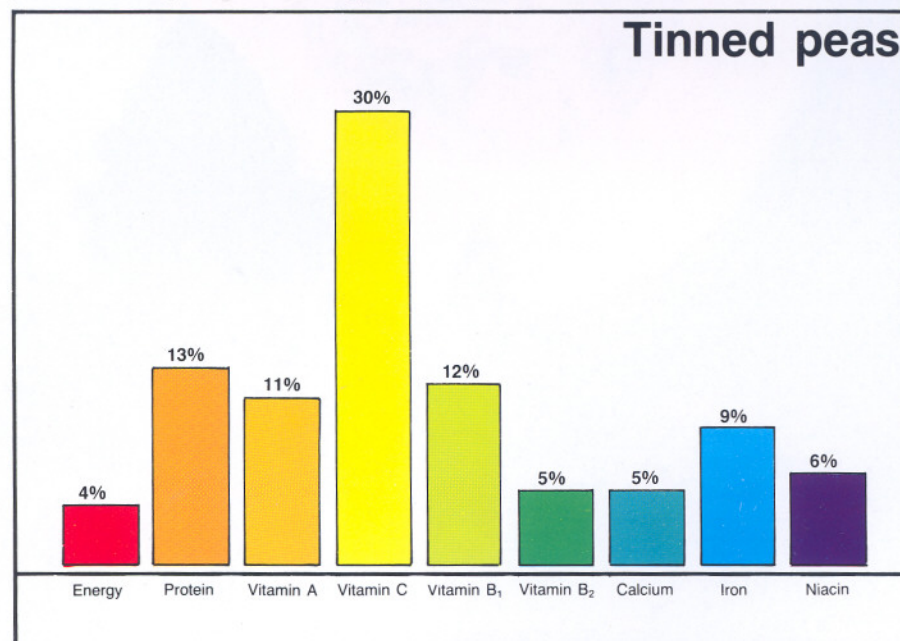
Pumpkin plants grow easily from either seeds or cuttings with roots. There are many different varieties of pumpkin, which differ in flavour, texture, colour and storing quality. The best way to get the desired variety is to plant cuttings.

Pumpkins grow best in loose, rich soil. The site of an old rubbish heap is a good place for growing pumpkins. Kitchen scraps put round the plants will also add goodness to the soil. Brushing the flowers gently with a feather or brush will help to produce more pumpkins.

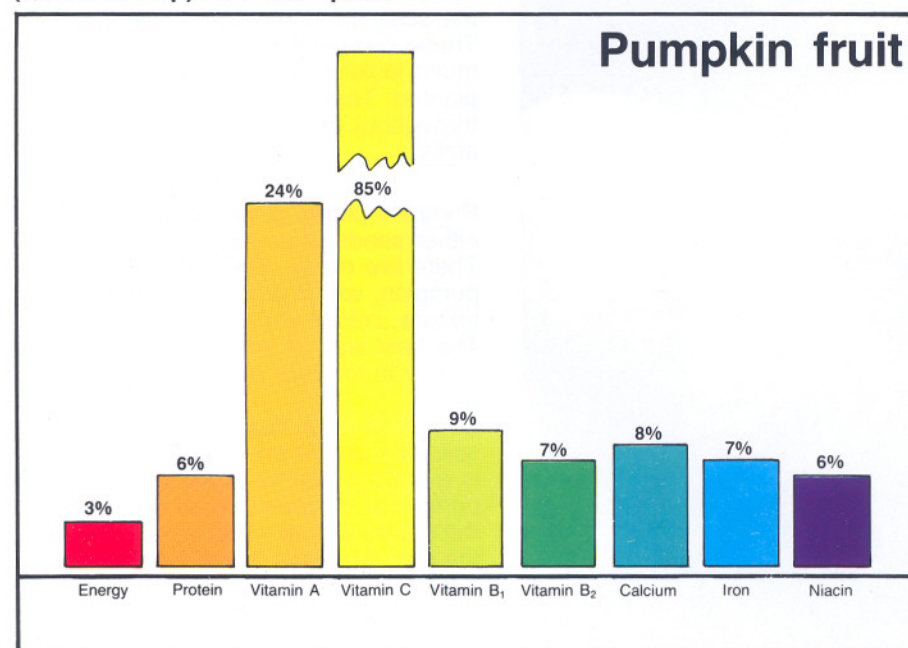




Percentage of daily needs of an adult woman, filled by one serving (about ½ cup after cooking) of pumpkin leaves<sup>1</sup>



Percentage of daily needs of an adult woman, filled by one serving (about ½ cup) of tinned peas<sup>2</sup>



Percentage of daily needs of an adult woman, filled by one serving (about ½ cup after cooking) of pumpkin fruit<sup>1</sup>

## Health giving

Pumpkin leaves, fruit, flowers and seeds are all protective, health-giving foods. They contain vitamins and minerals the body needs to stay healthy.

The dark green pumpkin **leaves** are an excellent source of **Vitamin A**. The body needs Vitamin A for proper growth, healthy eyes and protection from disease. The leaves are also a good source of **calcium**, **Vitamin C**, **iron** and **protein**. Calcium helps to make strong bones and teeth. Vitamin C keeps the body tissues strong, helps the body use iron, and helps chemical actions in the body. Iron helps keep blood healthy, and the body needs protein to grow and stay healthy.

Looking at the bar graphs it is easy to see that pumpkin leaves have more food value than tinned peas. Pumpkin leaves have much more Vitamin A and Vitamin C. Tinned peas are much more expensive than pumpkin leaves and have to be imported. Eating vegetables grown near the home is healthier and will save you money.

The **fruit** of the pumpkin is another health-giving food. It is an excellent source of **Vitamin A** and a good source of **Vitamin C**. Cooked, mashed pumpkin is an excellent food for babies.

Pumpkin **flowers** can also be eaten and are a good source of **Vitamin A**.

The most nutritious of all pumpkin foods are the seeds. They are an excellent source of **Vitamin A** and also **Vitamin B<sub>1</sub>** (thiamin) and **niacin**. Vitamin B<sub>1</sub> and niacin help the body convert carbohydrate into energy and heat.

## Uses

Most of the uses for pumpkin are for food and these are described in the next section. In some places pumpkin seeds are used to get rid of worms.

1. From *Food composition tables for use in the Pacific Islands*, South Pacific Commission, 1983.

2. From *Metric tables of composition of Australian foods*, Commonwealth Department of Health, 1977.



## Preparation and cooking

The tender leaves and stems, flowers, fruit and seeds of pumpkin can all be eaten.

**Leaves** should be washed in clean water before cooking. Remove any tough stems. Place leaves in boiling water, cover and cook for about 5 to 10 minutes, until just tender. Eating green leaves with coconut cream or other fats helps the body to use the Vitamin A in the leaves. Pan-frying is also a good way to prepare pumpkin leaves. Heat a little cooking oil in a pot and add chopped garlic or ginger. Add cut up leaves, cover and cook for about ten minutes, shaking the pot often.

To cook the **tips** of the vines, scrape or peel off the hairy skin first. Boil in water or coconut cream until just tender, as for the leaves. The tips then can be made into a salad. Cool the cooked tips, chop them and flavour with lemon juice.

Before cooking pumpkin **flowers**, the centres of the flowers must be pulled out. These flowers are delicious fried in a little butter or cooking oil, or dipped into batter and then fried. They can also be added to fish and meat dishes.

Pumpkin **fruit** can be baked, steamed, boiled or fried. It is delicious served as a vegetable or made into tasty curries, soups or desserts. Pumpkin has the best flavour when cooked in the skin. The skin of very young pumpkin can be eaten, but it is best to peel the skin off older ones.

Pumpkins can also be baked whole. Puncture the skin with a fork and bake it until it is soft. The cooking time will depend on the size of the pumpkin. When cooked, cut the pumpkin in half and scoop out the seeds before serving.

Another way to cook pumpkin whole is to cut the top off and scoop out the seeds. Stuff it with fresh or tinned meat or fish, and fresh vegetables, or coconut cream and onions. Replace the top and bake in an earth oven or a regular oven until cooked. Cut up the pumpkin and filling and serve hot.

The **seeds** are prepared by washing them carefully to remove the pulp. Then they can be boiled, toasted or dried in the sun. They make a delicious, cheap nutritious snack and are rich in protein and iron. They can also be fried in a little cooking oil and lightly salted. Do not throw away this valuable food.

## Storage and preservation

Whole pumpkins keep better if picked leaving 5 cm (2 inches) of the stem on the fruit. Dry them in the sun for a few days, then store them in a dry, shady place. They should not be touching each other. Pumpkins can be stored this way for up to six months.

Pumpkins may be preserved by drying or freezing. **Drying** pumpkin must be done carefully in order to kill all the germs that would make it spoil. Split the pumpkin in half and remove the seeds. Remove the skin and cut the fruit into thin slices. Steam for about 6 minutes. Spread on a tray and dry in the sun or in a solar dryer until dry and brittle. This will take about 2 days. If flies are a problem, cover with netting. Pumpkin needs to be dried in hot sun so that it dries quickly before it spoils.

**Freezing** is another way of preserving pumpkins. Wash the pumpkin and cut it into pieces. Remove seeds, but do not peel. Cook until soft by boiling, steaming or baking. Scrape the pumpkin flesh from the skin and mash it well. Pack, seal and freeze immediately. Mashed pumpkin may be used later for baby foods, soups and breads.

## Pumpkin and custard

*Six servings:*

- 1 small pumpkin
- 2 cups milk
- 3 eggs
- ¼ cup sugar

1. Cut the top off the pumpkin. Scoop out the seeds.
2. Beat the eggs lightly and mix in the sugar.
3. Heat milk until it is just boiling. Add to the egg and sugar mixture. Mix well.
4. Pour the egg mixture into the pumpkin.
5. Replace top and bake in an earth oven or moderate oven (350°F or 180°C) for about 1 hour, until cooked.
6. Cool, slice and serve as a dessert.

*Note:* Sugar may be replaced by onion, green vegetable and a little salt to make this a savoury dish.

## Fried pumpkin flowers

*Four servings:*

- 3 cups pumpkin flowers (about 20 large ones)
- 1 fresh fish
- 1 medium onion
- 1 large tomato
- 1 tablespoon cooking oil
- ½ cup water or stock
- Salt and pepper to taste

1. Clean the fish, remove all the bones and skin. Cut the fish into small pieces.
2. Peel and chop the onion. Wash and finely slice the tomato.
3. Remove the centres and stem from the pumpkin flowers. Wash the remaining flower petals well.
4. Heat cooking oil in a frying pan. Add the onion and cook until golden brown.
5. Add the tomato. When cooked add fish and cook for about 10 minutes.
6. Add the water or stock. When mixture begins to boil, add the pumpkin flowers and season with salt and pepper.
7. Serve hot with cooked breadfruit, banana or root crops.

*Note:* Choose male flowers for this recipe so female flowers are left to develop fruit.



After picking, dry pumpkins in the sun for a few days before storing.



## Pasolo fish

*Two servings:*

1 fresh, cooked fish  
Pumpkin leaves  
1 coconut  
1 onion, chopped  
Salt to taste

1. Grate coconut and squeeze out the cream into a pot.
2. Add the chopped onion, and salt to taste.
3. Bring mixture to the boil.
4. Wash the pumpkin leaves. Wrap small pieces of fish in the leaves.
5. Add the fish parcels to the boiling coconut cream.
6. Cover with a lid and cook for 5 minutes.
7. Serve with cooked taro, cassava or breadfruit.

## Savoury bananas

*Four servings:*

4 ripe cooking bananas  
12 matchbox-sized pieces of pumpkin  
2 spring onions  
1 green pepper (optional)  
4 serving pieces fresh fish  
2 cups coconut cream

1. Put the fish pieces into a pot or baking dish.
2. Peel the bananas and cut lengthwise. Arrange on top of the fish.
3. Wash and chop the spring onions and green pepper. Sprinkle on top of the bananas.
4. Wash the pumpkin, cut into slices and add to the bananas.
5. Add coconut cream.
6. Cook for about 30 minutes or until the bananas are soft.
7. Serve hot.

## Pumpkin bread

1 kg wholemeal flour  
1 teaspoon instant yeast  
1 cup of cooked, mashed pumpkin  
2 tablespoons toddy, golden syrup or honey  
3 1/3 cups lukewarm water or coconut cream

1. Mix toddy, syrup or honey with lukewarm water or coconut cream and mashed pumpkin.
2. Put flour into a bowl and mix in the instant yeast.
3. Make a well in the centre of the flour and pour in the lukewarm mixture.
4. Mix and work well into a soft moist dough.
5. Shape dough into rolls and put into greased baking tins.
6. Leave to rise for 10 to 15 minutes.
7. Bake in a moderate oven for 30 minutes or until bread sounds hollow when tapped.

*Note:* Shelled pumpkin seeds can be added to the dry flour and yeast mixture.

## Pumpkin drink

*Two servings:*

1 cup cooked, mashed pumpkin  
1 cup coconut cream  
1 cup cooking water from pumpkin  
Sugar or toddy to taste

1. Prepare the pumpkin and leave to cool.
2. Mix all the ingredients well in a bowl or jug.
3. Cool and serve.

## Chicken and pumpkin soup

*Six servings:*

2 tablespoons cooking oil  
1/3 cup chopped onions  
1 kg (2 lb) chicken  
4 cups water  
2 tomatoes, chopped  
4 cups sliced and peeled pumpkin fruit  
6 pumpkin tips  
1 cup coconut cream  
1 green pepper, sliced (optional)  
3 tablespoons lemon juice (optional)  
Salt to taste

1. Wash pumpkin tips, prepare and chop.
2. Fry onion in the cooking oil until tender.
3. Cut chicken into small pieces.
4. Add cut-up chicken to onion and cook for 10 minutes uncovered.
5. Add water, lemon juice and salt to taste.
6. Bring to the boil, lower heat and cook for 15 minutes, covered.
7. Add tomatoes, pumpkin, green pepper and pumpkin tips. Cook for 5 more minutes.
8. Add coconut cream. As soon as the mixture comes to the boil again, remove from heat.
9. Serve hot with cooked root crops or breadfruit.

This leaflet is the twelfth of a series devoted to the uses of local Pacific foods. Other leaflets available in this series are:

Leaflet 1 - Taro  
Leaflet 2 - Pawpaw  
Leaflet 3 - Mango  
Leaflet 4 - Guava  
Leaflet 5 - Cassava  
Leaflet 6 - Green leaves  
Leaflet 7 - Banana  
Leaflet 8 - Coconut  
Leaflet 9 - Breadfruit  
Leaflet 10 - Pineapple  
Leaflet 11 - Citrus fruits  
Leaflet 13 - Sweet potato  
Leaflet 14 - Yam  
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Leaflet 18 - Seafoods

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