

# Pumpkin seasonings

by Lydia Lovell

"When the frost is on the pumpkin..." Aunt Olivia turned her hand to pies, and puddings, and breads, but that's not the reason pumpkins are the subject of this week's cooking column.

Hand-lettered, the sign was tacked to the shelf-edge and read, "PLEASE DO NOT PICK UP THE PUMPKINS BY THE STEMS." On the ground below the sign sat a row of fat orange pumpkins at the roadside stand where we stopped to buy apples. A pumpkin's stem, used as a handle, soon tires; in falling, the pumpkin is bruised. Worse yet, a pumpkin without a stem is useless for a jack o' lantern.

Aunt Olivia always let us carve our own Hallowe'en jack o' lanterns. With plenty of pumpkins ripening on the vines, she chose appropriate sizes for each of us, insisted we draw, and redraw if necessary, the faces before we started cutting, and never failed to remind us the mouth needed to be high enough so melted wax wouldn't run out between the snaggy teeth once a candle was cemented firmly inside. Remembering the odor of candle-seared pumpkin meat makes my nostrils quiver.

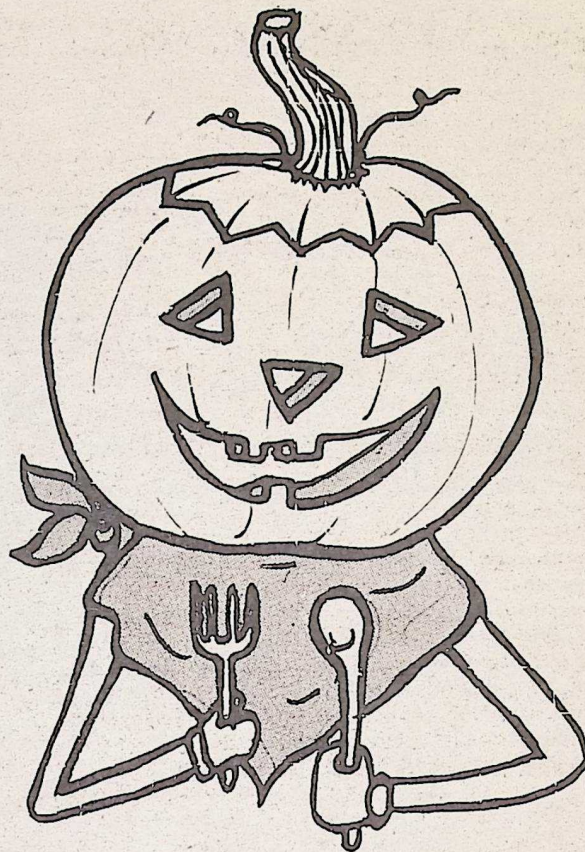
Although Aunt Olivia was adamantly opposed to waste, she considered a jack o' lantern a good use for the vegetable. "At Hallowe'en," she said, "pumpkins are part of the fun." They were, indeed. Besides, there were plenty of pumpkins and a limited demand. A person can do only so many things with a pumpkin.

Pies, puddings, soup, bread. That about covers it. Pie is probably best of all. When Aunt Olivia planned to make pumpkin pie, she began a day ahead. First she prepared the pumpkin meat. After washing a good-sized pumpkin, she cut it in half, removed the seeds, and baked the two halves, cut-side-down, in a shallow pan at 375° until fork tender but not mushy. Removing them from the oven and turning the halves cut-side-up, Aunt Olivia scraped the flesh into a colander with a big spoon and set it to drain. She left it out in the shed, where it was cool, overnight.

By morning, most of the liquid had dripped out of the pumpkin meat, leaving it quite dry. After being whipped thoroughly to remove all lumps, it was ready for use.

For pie, the first step is making the crust. Aunt Olivia used 3 cups of flour sifted with a teaspoon of salt; then she cut in one cup of shortening until the mixture was pebbly. Measuring 5 tablespoons of cold water into a cup, she sprinkled the dough with the water, stirring lightly with a fork, adding only enough water to hold the pastry together.

After rolling out the dough on a floured surface, she flipped



the crust into the pie pan, reminding me never to stretch pastry and to handle it no more than necessary. "Makes it tough to work it," she said, and "Better to have some left over than try to make do with too little." Leftover-pastry, together with the trimmings from the edge of the pieplate after the rim had been formed between fingers and thumbs, were rolled, spread with butter, sprinkled with cinnamon and sugar, curled up like a jelly roll, cut into one-inch lengths, and baked for melt-in-mouth treats.

**Pumpkin pie fillings** are as individuals as people. Aunt Olivia's favorite follows: Preheat oven to 450°. Heat (but do not boil) 1½ cups milk over low fire; set aside. Lightly beat 3 eggs; add ¾ cup light brown sugar, pinch of salt, 1 teaspoon allspice, 1 teaspoon cinnamon, ½ teaspoon ground cloves. Beat again. Combine egg mixture with hot milk and 1½ cups cooked pumpkin. Beat until smooth. Pour into pie shell and bake at 450° for 15 minutes. Reduce heat to 350° and bake 30

minutes or until silver knife blade comes out clean when inserted halfway between center and edge of filling. Cool before serving.

Sometimes Aunt Olivia used a filling that was Uncle Henry's choice. I think when he found out it called for a teaspoon of whiskey, he deemed it superior to all others. Either recipe pleased the rest of the family, but this one is much the richer of the two.

Separate 4 eggs and beat the yolks lightly. Combine with 2 cups cooked pumpkin meat and a mixture of 1 cup sugar, 1 tablespoon cornstarch, ½ teaspoon cinnamon. Beat for five minutes. Mix in 1/3 cup heavy cream, ¼ cup melted butter, and 1 teaspoon bourbon or rum. Beat the egg whites until rounded peaks form. Fold into pumpkin mixture. Pour into 9" pie plate lined with pastry; bake at 375° about 45 minutes until set. Cool before serving.

Down the lane from the Lovells lived the Lewis family; Malvina Lewis declared her pumpkin pie recipe was over a hundred years old. Whatever its age, it makes a fine pie. Put 2 cups milk on a low fire to heat. Measure 1½ cups cooked pumpkin into a bowl. To one cup sugar, add a handful of flour (if that is too imprecise for you, try a scant ¼ cup of flour). Stir in 1 teaspoon cinnamon, ½ teaspoon ginger (optional), ½ teaspoon salt. Beat 2 eggs lightly, combine with warm milk and stir into pumpkin mixture. Taste for sweetness and spices before pouring into 9" pie plate. Bake slowly at 325° about an hour or a bit more.

**Pumpkin Bread** is as spicy and good as pumpkin pie, and more easily prepared if making piecrust is a chore. Cream together until fluffy 1 cup dark brown sugar and ½ cup shortening. Add two eggs, one at a time, beating well after each. Stir in 1 cup cooked pumpkin and ¼ cup milk. Sift together 2 cups flour, 2 teaspoons baking powder, ½ teaspoon salt, ¼ teaspoon soda, ½ teaspoon ginger, ¼ teaspoon ground cloves. Stir into pumpkin mixture. Beat for one minute. Add ½ cup broken walnut meats and pour into buttered 9x5x3" loaf pan. Bake at 350° about an hour. Remove from pan and cool. Slice and spread with butter or cream cheese.

There are people who make **Pumpkin Soup**, but I never knew Aunt Olivia to attempt to feed that to the Lovells. I'm not sure what would have happened if she had. In any case, if you'd like to make some, bring 3 cups chicken broth to a simmer, add 1 cup cooked pumpkin meat, ½ teaspoon each of salt and dried celery flakes, 1 teaspoon minced chives and a dash of pepper. Taste for flavoring. If you prefer a sweeter flavor, add half a teaspoon of sugar. Finally, pour in ¼ cup milk, heat gently, and serve four.

Cooked pumpkin looks enough like cooked sweet potato to deceive all but the most discerning...until the old saw, "proof of the pudding is in the eating," comes into play, but Aunt Olivia had Uncle Henry convinced he was enjoying sweet potato pudding when he was really eating **Pumpkin Pudding**. This is how she did it:

To two cups of pumpkin meat add ¼ teaspoon salt, a dash of pepper, and a tablespoon of dark brown sugar. After grating 2 teaspoons orange rind and squeezing ¼ cup orange juice, add both to pumpkin. Beat one egg, stir in ¼ cup sugar, and combine with pumpkin mixture. Spread into a buttered baking dish. Sprinkle with cinnamon and bake, uncovered, at 350° for about 30 minutes. Serves four topped with vanilla ice cream.

This time of year, the frost is on the pumpkin, so bring a few into the kitchen and bake up a goodly amount. Pumpkin pie, pumpkin pudding, pumpkin bread will all find favor with the family. I don't know about pumpkin soup. You could try it...

Do remember though...please do not pick up pumpkins by the stems. And at Hallowe'en, set a jack o' lantern on the step. Just for fun.