

## Turn a good pumpkin into a Great Pumpkin

By DANIEL NEMAN  
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Pumpkins aren't just meant for pie or playful evisceration. They are also a vegetable, a squash, and can therefore be eaten.

The question is: How? How to best eat a pumpkin?

The other questions is: Why? Pumpkins don't taste particularly good. Why would you want to eat them?

The answer is: Not all pumpkins are created equal. Smaller pumpkins are often delicious and are reminiscent of other winter squash. It's the larger jack-o'-lantern type of pumpkins that give all the other pumpkins a bad reputation, at least in terms of texture and flavor.

So I decided to do something about it. I decided to take some pumpkins, stuff them full of other things, and then roast them.

It's not an idea I had by myself. In 2010, the highly regarded food writer Dorie Greenspan included a recipe for stuffed pumpkin in her cookbook "Around My French Table," and they have been a popular dish since then.

So I started with Greenspan's groundbreaking recipe — though the idea was not original with her, either; people have been stuffing pumpkins for decades.

As with three of the recipes I made, I used pie pumpkins for this dish. Pie or sugar pumpkins, which are always labeled such, have the best flavor of all pumpkins. They are sweet, but only a little, and the mild sweetness merely adds a hint of intrigue to a savory dish.

Each of the recipes uses a starch to help fill out the pumpkin. In Greenspan's in-egantly named Pumpkin Stuffed With Everything Good, the starch is stale bread. It is used as the foundation for layers of other flavors: cheese, garlic, bacon or sausage — optional, if you want to keep it vegetarian — scallions, thyme, cream and a touch of nutmeg.

Those ingredients are satisfying enough as they are, but don't forget the additional taste of pumpkin. A chunk of pumpkin in every bite makes a good meal better.

Next, I roasted a pumpkin stuffed with shepherd's pie. That's really all you need to know: It's shepherd's pie inside a roasted pumpkin. If you kind of squint your taste buds, it is somewhat like eating moussaka, with pumpkin replacing the eggplant. And while pumpkin tastes nothing at all like eggplant, it also kind of does.

I used ground beef for my shepherd's pie, but ground lamb, I imagine, would be just as good.

The next dish I made uses a large pumpkin — or at least large for a pie pumpkin — five or six pounds. It's good for a substantial meal, which is why it's called Stuffed Pumpkin Dinner. People



Stuffed Baby Pumpkins.

Hillary Levin/St. Louis Post-Dispatch-TNS

who are tired of turkey have been known to make it for Thanksgiving.

The starch this time is rice (in the shepherd's pie recipe, it is mashed potatoes). The rice is mixed with ground beef, onions, green pepper and tomato sauce, so basically it is a chopped-up stuffed pepper stuffed into a pumpkin, with a few twists.

The biggest twist is the way it is cooked. Because the pumpkin is larger, the stuffing inside will be overcooked by the time the pumpkin is cooked through. So to remedy that, you steam the pumpkin for 30 minutes to soften the exterior before stuffing and baking it.

It works like a charm.

My favorite of the four stuffed-pumpkin dishes did not use pie pumpkins; it used mini pumpkins, which are just a couple of inches tall.

These are stuffed with baby kale, breadcrumbs (that's the starch), cheese, scallions, garlic, pine nuts and more, all moistened (or more) with heavy cream. The small pumpkins are wonderfully tender when cooked, and a little sweet. Or at least they aren't bitter.

Whatever. They taste wonderful, a little bit nutty, with the unbeatable combination of kale (or spinach, if you prefer), cheese and cream. The pine nuts add a toasty crunch.

Most people use mini pumpkins for decoration. But if you stuff a few and roast them, you'll have a side dish worth celebrating at the most celebratory time of the year.

### PUMPKIN STUFFED WITH EVERYTHING GOOD

Makes 2 to 4 servings

- 1 pumpkin, about 3 pounds
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- 1/4 pound stale bread, thinly sliced and cut into 1/2-inch chunks
- 1/4 pound cheese, such as Gruyère, Emmentaler, cheddar, or a combination, cut into 1/2-inch chunks
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 4 slices bacon, cooked until crisp, drained, and chopped
- 1/4 cup snipped fresh chives or sliced scallions
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh thyme
- 1/3 cup heavy cream
- Pinch of freshly grated nutmeg

1. Center a rack in the oven and preheat to 350 degrees. Line a baking sheet with a silicone baking mat or parchment.

2. Using a very sturdy knife — and caution — cut a cap out of the top of the pumpkin as you would a jack-o'-lantern. You want to cut off enough of the top to make it easy for you to work inside the pumpkin. Clear away the seeds and strings from the cap and from inside the pumpkin. Season the inside of the pumpkin generously with salt and pepper, and put it on the prepared baking sheet.

3. Toss the bread, cheese, garlic, bacon, chives (or scallions) and thyme together in a bowl. Season with pepper (add salt, if you are not using the bacon) and pack the mix into the pumpkin. The pumpkin should be well filled; you may have too much mix, or too little. Stir the cream with the nutmeg and some salt and pepper and pour it into the pumpkin.

4. Put the cap in place and bake the pumpkin for about 2 hours — check after 90 minutes — or until everything inside the pumpkin is bubbling and the flesh of the pumpkin is tender enough to be pierced easily with the tip of a knife. Remove the cap during the last 20 minutes or so, so that the liquid can bake away and the top of the stuffing can brown a little.

5. When the pumpkin is ready, bring it to the table with care — it's heavy, hot and wobbly.

Per serving (based on 4 servings): 451 calories; 25 g fat; 12 g saturated fat; 58 mg cholesterol; 18 g protein; 42 g carbohydrate; 11 g sugar; 3 g fiber; 620 mg sodium; 303 mg calcium

— Slightly adapted from a recipe in "Around My French Table," by Dorie Greenspan

### SHEPHERD'S PIE STUFFED PUMPKIN

Yield: 8 servings

- 1 large or 2 small pie pumpkins
- 1 1/2 pounds russet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 1/2 pounds ground beef or lamb
- 1 onion, minced
- 2 cups chopped mushrooms (optional)
- Salt and pepper
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 2 cups chicken or beef broth
- 1 1/2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 2 cups frozen pea-carrot medley, thawed (optional)
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1/2 cup half-and-half

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. Cover potatoes with water in a large saucepan.

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Gretchen McKay/Pittsburgh Post-Gazette-TNS  
Baked in a cast-iron pan, this savory Dutch baby is topped with roasted mushrooms, bacon and shredded cheddar.

## Skill with a skillet Properly seasoned cast-iron cookware is versatile

By GRETCHEN MCKAY  
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Nonstick pans are a godsend for frying eggs and flipping pancakes, and an enameled Dutch oven will never disappoint while cooking soups, stews and sauces. But when it comes to the workhorse of kitchen equipment, nothing beats a well-seasoned cast-iron pan.

Not only is cast-iron cookware relatively inexpensive — a 12-inch classic skillet from Lodge costs less than \$30 at Target — it's incredibly versatile. You might think grandma used it just for frying chicken or making cornbread, but you also can roast a chicken or sear a steak in a cast-iron pan, use one to make the fluffiest pancakes, bake a deep-dish pizza or loaf of bread in one, or even panfry a delicate piece of fish.

Properly seasoned, cast-iron pans boast a silky, shiny surface that's naturally nonstick, eliminating the need for added fats. It also retains even, constant heat if the pan has been preheated over medium-high heat on the stovetop or in a 500-degree oven.

Not sold? The cookware also can go directly from the stovetop or oven to the table, and if you take care of it properly, cast-iron lasts for generations, earning it points for sustainability.

Cooking on cast iron might even be good for your health, because a small amount of iron is transferred from the pan to your food to your body every time you use it.

Below, we demonstrate cast-iron cookware's versatility with three fall recipes.

### ROASTED MUSHROOM AND BACON DUTCH BABY

The large, fluffy pancake known as the Dutch baby is often made with sweet ingredients for breakfast or dessert. But the one-pan dish also lends itself to savory preparations, and it's the perfect food to make in a properly seasoned cast-iron skillet.

Baked in the oven instead of fried on the stovetop, the pancake is topped with a scrumptious mix of roasted mushroom, crispy bacon and cheddar cheese. Served with a simple green salad, it makes a terrific lunch or light supper.

For a vegetarian dish, simply omit the bacon.

- 1 pound mixed mushrooms (such as cremini, button or shitake), sliced
- 4 slices bacon, sliced
- 3 large eggs
- 1 clove garlic, chopped
- 3/4 cup whole milk
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted, divided
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour, spooned and leveled
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch
- Kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon fresh thyme
- 2 ounces cheddar cheese, grated (about 1/2 cup)
- 1 scallion, thinly sliced
- 2 tablespoons chopped flat-leaf parsley

Set oven racks in middle and upper positions. Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Place mushrooms and bacon on a rimmed baking sheet. Place on top rack in oven while preheating, and roast, stirring once, until mushrooms are golden brown, 25 to 30 minutes. Place a 10-inch cast-iron skillet on middle rack and heat 15 minutes.

Place eggs and garlic in a blender. Process on high until frothy, 45 seconds. With blender running, gradually add milk and 2 tablespoons butter; stop blender. Add flour, cornstarch, and 1/4 teaspoon salt; process 1 minute. Fold in thyme.

Carefully add remaining tablespoon butter to heated skillet and swirl to coat. Immediately add batter. Bake until golden brown and puffed, 14 to 16 minutes. Sprinkle with cheese and bake until melted, 3 to 5 minutes.

Top with mushroom mixture, scallions and parsley. Serves 4-6.

— Countryliving.com

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Stuffed Pumpkin Dinner.

Hillary Levin/St. Louis Post-Dispatch-TNS

## Opera and armory: Remembering the Steward Building

**GINNY MAMMEN**  
OUT AND ABOUT

As we move east on Adams Avenue in La Grande we come to a one-story cinderblock building with a stone veneer constructed at 1209 Adams in 1978. Over the past 40 years it has housed such businesses as State Farm Insurance and the

current Kettle Corn N More. We, however, are going to focus on the previous building located here and on the adjoining parking lot. Following two fires in downtown La Grande in 1891, during which many of the wood frame buildings were destroyed, there were vacant spaces waiting to be filled, in this case lots 11, 12 and 13 of Chaplain's Addition next to the Rogers Building. David H. Steward had

come to La Grande in 1882 shortly after the fires. He purchased lot 13 in 1886 and lots 11 and 12 in 1890. It was then he decided to construct the large two-story building in these lots next to the Rogers Building, and the Steward Building was open by 1893.

There was a colorful parade of activities and businesses over the next 80 years.

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Richard Hermens and John Turner Collection/Contributed Photo

The Steward Building was built by David H. Steward and was open by 1893.