

## How to carve your pumpkin like a pro

... with tips from an actual pro



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This past spring, Jennie Hagan had excavation work done on her Baker County property revealing the soil was at least 4 feet deep — perfect for gardening.



JENNIE HAGEN

GARDENING WITH GRANDMA

## Sad to see another garden season end

As I look over my shoulder to the east, a small slice of sky is still blue, being quickly overtaken by the grey clouds of change. I'm not ready for it. Yet even the fruit trees have signaled their quiet resignation toward winter. Greens leaves are giving way to colors and falling each day with increasing speed. I am going to miss this year of gardening.

This past spring, we had excavation work done on our Baker County property that went through part of our yard. We were surprised to see that the soil was at least 4 feet deep. No rocks, no large gravel, just dirt, straight down, to 4 feet in depth. We'd never seen anything like it and most certainly not in Central or Eastern Oregon. This gave us insight into the type of produce garden that just might be possible.

Though easy to till, it was clear that this "dirt" lacked mulch or organic fertilizer of any kind. By combining one 1.5-cubic-foot of bagged outdoor garden mix and one bag of steer manure, it took just four bags of each to cover our 450-square-foot fenced garden area. This gave us far more in return than we expected.

We used our standard raised beds only we aren't making them as wide as we used to when we were younger. They are only 3 feet wide now, not the usual 4 feet as in years gone by. Even with water applications being done to just the raised beds that had the dikes around them, as vegetation grew it became necessary to water twice a day, especially through those hot 100-degree days. This is what has worked for us this year, and no, we don't need any more tomatoes!

I know many of you had the same struggles and likewise the same success as we did. Gardens in our tri-county region have been beautiful this year. For those of us on the valley floors, we can expect the deeper soil levels. Start moving up away from the valleys, and the rocks grow fast. So, what's next?

Fall is perfect for planting trees, shrubs and any kind of woody perennial. Saving seeds throughout the year is always fun, but if it's your first time saving seeds, and you want to know more about it, probably the best source of advice will be found at our very own Oregon State University Extension service. Type "www.extension.oregonstate.edu" into your web browser then select "gardening" and you'll find a nearly endless supply of shared knowledge. Type "seed saving" into the search bar and you'll get more information. The Extension Service has many printable papers available but also access to free videos with gardening topics, and outstanding books of horticultural interest.

This Grandma has just enough time to go gather a few more seeds today and make plans for getting more spring flowering bulbs in the ground tomorrow.

Jennie Hagen is a native Oregonian who has spent 40 years gardening east of the Cascades. She is a member of the Garden Writers Association and has previously written for the Home & Garden section of The Oregonian, and for The Observer, the Baker City Herald, and the Burns Times Herald.

PHILADELPHIA — Have you ever seen a piece of art and thought, "I could totally do that — and better"?

That's what David Morgenstern realized when searching for pumpkin carving inspiration online 16 years ago. Now, Morgenstern runs Stoneykins, where he sells custom-made intricate jack o'lanterns and design stencils, while also running a Facebook hotline to answer pumpkin carving questions.

Morgenstern, who attended the Art Institute of Philadelphia, hails from South Philly. He is winner of the 2013 Pumpkin Masters Online Carving contest and the 2021 Great Pumpkin Carve in Chadds Ford. He's known for his intricate, detailed pieces, with carvings for the NFL and Rolling Stone Magazine among others.

It's in the basement of his home, where Morgenstern has his laboratory of tools, tricks and pumpkins to build his creations. Upstairs in his office — filled with more (creepy and friendly) pumpkins — he designs carving patterns and answers the questions of amateur and pro pumpkin carvers around the world.

"I have a year's worth of work in two months," he said about the fall season. "One day, I'll get no orders. One day, I'll get 25 from the same person."

Through trial and error, Morgenstern developed two jack o'lantern carving methods — for carvings of the Joker to the gates of Hell — which he shares below.

### What tools you'll need to carve a pumpkin

"The tools are the key," Morgenstern said, and can make the pumpkin carving process seamless. Find all you need online or at local craft stores.

- Sharpie pen
- Serrated spoon or large spoon
- Large washable glue stick
- Printed designs or stencils (Stoneykins has plenty to choose from.)
- Sheetrock saw
- Art transfer paper (Morgenstern recommends the white Saral paper.)
- Pumpkin carving saw (Morgenstern recommends a Warren Pro.)
- Ceramic loop tool, pear-shaped
- X-Acto knife blade No. 2, with No. 15 keyhole
- Speedball Lino set (Only V and U nibs needed.)
- Clay ribbon tool (This is for final cleanup of a shaded carving.)

### Pro-tip: You'll also want a pot

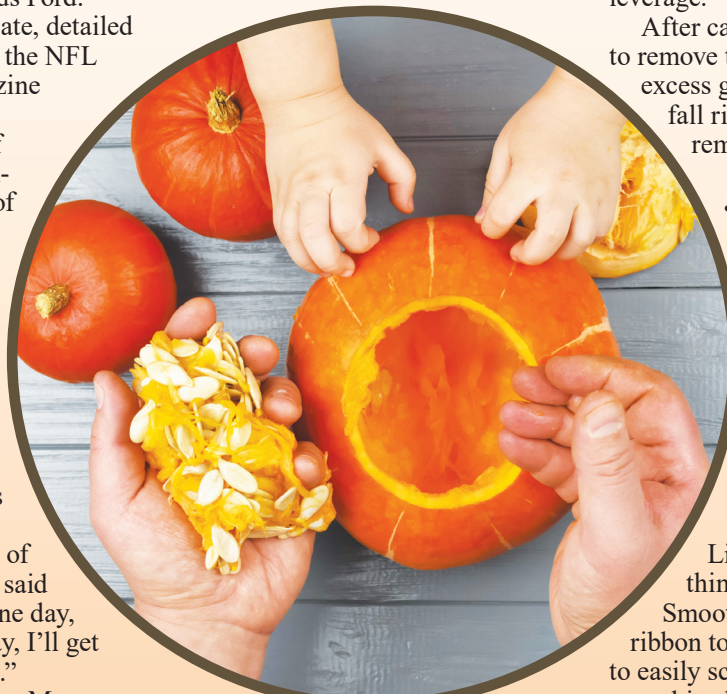
Before you begin, place your pumpkin on a pot for ease of carving. Be sure to find one with a rim size that's just a bit smaller than the pumpkin you're carving so that it sits nice and snug.

"If you're putting it on the table by itself without the pot, then you're constantly angling it and holding it," Morgenstern explained. "If you put it on a pot, then both your hands are free."

1. Cut a hole for the lid  
Using your Sharpie pen, outline a carving path at the top of the pumpkin for your lid — the stem will be your handle.

When carving the lid, be sure the Sheetrock Saw is at a 45 degree angle.

"If I was cutting straight, the lid would fall in the pumpkin," he said. "So if you do it at an angle, it will have a bevel edge."



When cutting out the lid, skip the seemingly obvious circle.

Natalia Kozynska/Dreamstime-TNS

Pro-tip: When cutting out the lid, skip the seemingly obvious circle. Outline a little pumpkin instead — the "stem" of your outline will let you easily place the pumpkin's top back on later, so you don't have to adjust the lid until it's flush.

Cut off the access on the lid for a clean top.

2. Gut your pumpkin  
Gut the pumpkin with a serrated or large spoon. Then, use a pear-shaped ceramic loop tool to scrape the excess and thin the pumpkin walls.

Be sure to make the front wall — where your design will be carved — even thinner by about 3/4 of an inch. (More on how to gauge the wall's thickness in the next step.)

3. The glue stick method  
Smear a washable glue stick on the back of a printed cut-out design. (Print the designs on sticker paper to skip the glue, if you're okay spending a bit more money.) Cut slits on the sides of the pattern for the design to line up with the curves and grooves of the pumpkin.

Stick the pattern on the pumpkin and overlap those slits for a nice fit. Smooth out wrinkles.

"Wherever you see grooves of the pumpkin, you wanna get your finger

and put that pattern right in the groove," he shared. "It only takes a little to make (the pattern) flush."

Wait about 5 to 10 minutes for the glue to dry. Then, carve right through the pattern with a No. 2 X-Acto Handle with No. 15 keyhole saw blades. Be sure to test the thickness of the pumpkin wall with the blade — if most of the blade comes through, you're all set. (Scrape the wall a bit more till the blade is clearly visible.)

Saw in a continuous motion for quick carving. Move the blade up-and-down without removing it from the pumpkin. Adjust the pumpkin as you carve for the best leverage.

After carving, soak the pumpkin to remove the printed design and excess glue — the paper will fall right off. Scrub off any remaining glue residue.

### ... Or try the transfer method

Tape art transfer paper (white works best) on the pumpkin. Place your printed design on top and use a pen to outline the pattern. Then carve the outline with the Speedball Lino, V nib.

Use the Speedball Lino, U nib for everything in between the outline.

Smooth out ridges with a clay ribbon tool. These tools allow you to easily scrape and design on the pumpkin skin.

This method works best for carving shaded or three-color patterns.

"The pattern is a negative image, but when you carve it and light it, it becomes a positive," Morgenstern said.

4. How to keep your jack o'lantern alive longer

Pumpkins, like humans, need to stay hydrated, Morgenstern said.

To make it last, dunk the pumpkin in water with bleach after carving — just in and out. For every gallon of water, add four tablespoons of bleach. Get the scented bleach if you wanna get fancy with it.

"It stops mold and mildew," he shared. "Your pumpkin's (going to) last longer — it'll give you like two weeks."

And to keep squirrels from snacking on your pumpkin, dampen the pumpkin and sprinkle paprika on it.

"They don't like the taste of it — they'll take a lick and say goodbye," he said.

Final pro-tips for some festive fun: Christmas lights are best for lighting a jack o'lantern. But if you're using a real candle, make sure you have a hole for venting.

Morgenstern's pro tip: Sprinkle some cinnamon powder on the inside of the lid. The candle will "cook" the spice and your jack o'lantern will smell like pumpkin pie.