mystery science

Grades K-5
Mini-Lesson: “Why are pumpkins so popular every fall?”

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Hi, it's Doug! So, every September, October, and November, stores across North America start selling pumpkins. You see them everywhere. The town that I grew up in, Sycamore, Illinois, has a huge pumpkin celebration every fall. Our town flag even has a pumpkin on it.

Someone named Josh has a question about pumpkins. Let's give him a call now.

[Video Call]
- Hi, Doug!
- Hi, Josh!
- I have a question for you. Why do people love pumpkins so much?
- That's a great question.

People really do seem to love pumpkins. Where I live, you can find them for sale at farms, pumpkin patches—they even sell them at grocery stores.

Now, lots of people buy them because they love to carve jack-o'-lanterns for Halloween, but that's not the only reason you see pumpkins in the fall. People love pumpkin-flavored foods.

You can buy just about anything in pumpkin flavor—drinks, waffles, cookies—they even make pumpkin-flavored chips.

But maybe the most famous pumpkin-flavored food of all is pumpkin pie. It's especially popular around Thanksgiving.

The pumpkins that people use for eating, like in pies, look like this. If you cut them open, they have really thick insides. It's this part right here, called the flesh of the pumpkin, that's the part that we eat. This pumpkin is a different kind of pumpkin from a jack-o'-lantern pumpkin. The pumpkin we use for eating is called a sugar pumpkin.

Sugar pumpkins and jack-o'-lantern pumpkins are two different varieties of pumpkin. It's just like there are different varieties of apples. You might have noticed that before. Or, just like there are different varieties of dogs. And pumpkins come in a lot more than just these two varieties. Think about it. Have you seen some other varieties of pumpkins before? What varieties have you seen?

If you want to take a moment to pause the video, now would be a good time.

Okay, check this out. All of these are varieties of pumpkins. Some of them—it's almost unbelievable that they're even pumpkins. Varieties of pumpkins like Tiger Stripe pumpkin, Ghost pumpkin, Fairytale, Queensland Blue, Hooligan pumpkin, Baby Bear—these are their real names. Check out this next one—Red Warty Thing. I wish I could keep going, but I can't even list them all. There are over 100 different varieties of pumpkins. It might seem weird that there are so many varieties of pumpkins and that we have names for them all. Why is that?

Well, people use different varieties for different purposes. Some of the more unusual-looking pumpkins, like Tiger Stripe and Red Warty Thing, people use as decorations, like on a table. But

some varieties people use for how they taste, not just the pumpkin-flavored foods you can buy at a store.

People use some pumpkin varieties in cooking and baking at home, like for making pumpkin soup, pumpkin cupcakes, pumpkin bread, and depending on where you live in the world, people even eat different parts of a pumpkin.

Rather than the pumpkin itself, some people eat the leaves of the pumpkin plant. Some people like to eat pumpkin seeds. Some people cook with pumpkin oil, which you can get from crushing the seeds. Some people even eat the flowers of the pumpkin plant, which are said to taste really good, especially when they're fried.

Okay, but there's one last pumpkin variety I really want to show you. It might be the weirdest of them all. Are you ready for this? Here it is. Giant pumpkins! This pumpkin variety grows to be huge—way bigger than any other pumpkin variety. They're called Atlantic Giant pumpkins. When I was a kid, my dad and I actually planted some seeds of a giant pumpkin, and we watered them all summer long. It didn't set any kind of world record, but by fall, we had grown the largest pumpkin in our town that year. Here's the actual photo of it. That's my dad, right there, and one of our neighbors who helped him lift it up. We even won a pumpkin trophy. This is the actual trophy. I still have it, and it makes me smile.

The reason people grow giant pumpkins is just for fun. It's to compete. They want to see who can grow the biggest one. But some people have also started to compete with giant pumpkin boat races. You've got to see this.

- On your mark, get set, row! Number Seven's going to flip, Brian McFaul's still rowing. You must make it all the way across the lake and back with your pumpkin.

So, in summary, pumpkins are popular in the fall because there are so many varieties of them with lots of different uses. Some are great for jack-o'-lanterns, some make interesting decorations, some are good for eating. Even though pumpkins are especially famous in the United States and Canada, pumpkins are used and loved by people all over the world.

That's all for this week's question. Thanks, Josh, for asking it!