



Pumpkin Carving How-To

1. Cover your work area (a countertop, table, or floor) with newspapers or a sheet of heavy plastic. If you will be working on a number of pumpkins, consider working outside where any debris can be hosed off or swept away.
2. Decide whether you will be cutting the top or the bottom off of the pumpkin in order to remove the seeds. Cutting a hole in the top offers an easy way to vent the heat from a candle, while cutting off the bottom allows for easier access over an electric light.
3. Before cutting into the pumpkin, determine how wide to cut the access hole. It should be large enough to fit your hand through as well as accommodate a spoon or other scraping tool. Not sure how large a hole to cut? Try about 6 inches in diameter.
4. Drawing on the pumpkin is a great way to see your design and will help contain your cuts to specific areas. Be aware, however, that a pencil or pen can dent the flesh of the pumpkin and a permanent marker may not wash off. Try washable markers or waxy china pencils instead.
5. Once you have drawn the circular area for the lid (or bottom), begin cutting with a knife or pumpkin saw. Knives will cut faster but with little precision. Saws are fairly delicate and may take longer to patiently saw out the opening. Too, exerting too much pressure on a pumpkin saw (sold in kits) may snap off the blade.
6. Be sure to cut the top out holding the knife at a 45 degree angle, with the tip of the knife pointing toward the center of the pumpkin. Why? So the lid has a surface to sit on and it won't slip through the opening into the pumpkin.
7. Choose which side of the pumpkin will be the "front". Then on the back side make a mark with a pen or cut a slit in both the lid and the adjoining pumpkin edge to mark how the lid should be realigned after carving.
8. Next, get your hands slimy by reaching in to pull out the strings and seeds. Scrape this material away from the sides and the bottom with a heavy serving spoon (don't use your best silver!) or another kitchen utensil such as an ice cream paddle.
9. Continue scraping until all of the strings have been dislodged then reach in to remove everything that is loose. You should end up with a clean inside, free from pumpkin seeds or strings.
10. For easier carving keep scraping the areas of the pumpkin where you plan to carve. Scraping the inner walls down to a thickness of about an inch will allow knives and carving tools to more easily pierce the pumpkin's flesh. (Test the depth of the skin by inserting a pin or small knife into an area that will be cut away.)
11. Remove all of these additional scrapings so the interior of the pumpkin is clean. Carve your pumpkin where you will be comfortable sitting at table, standing over it, or holding it in your lap.
12. Draw a face or other design onto the pumpkin. Do a casual pumpkin with a freehand design or trace a pattern especially designed for pumpkins. Use a combination of non-permanent markers, china pencil, or pin pricks to mark the design. Make sure that the design does not start too low on the pumpkin or some if it may be hidden when set on the porch.
13. Begin carving the design. Use tools you have including paring knives, utility blades, exacto knives, wood carving tools, or pumpkin saws and tools that are readily available in pumpkin carving sets sold in grocery stores during October.
14. Keep carving until the design is complete. Cut too much out by mistake? Sometimes these slips can be repaired by reattaching a piece using toothpicks or pins.
15. Test the look of your design by inserting a votive candle or flashlight into the pumpkin. Dim the room's lights to get the full effect. You'll be able to see where additional areas may need to be carved away or expanded to better showcase the design.

