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# PUMPKIN SEEDS

by Julie Cascio

Many people enjoy both hulled and unhulled roasted pumpkin seeds as a snack. Pumpkin seeds add a great crunch to salads and may be sprinkled on rice dishes or sautéed vegetables. Ground pumpkin seeds can be added to salad dressings, casseroles or baked goods.

## Nutrition and Health

Seeds are rich in minerals, calories and protein. Pumpkin seeds are a concentrated source of iron, zinc and magnesium and contain omega 6 and omega 3 fats. They are also high in fiber. Pumpkin seeds have a natural protective coating called the hull. The hulls are edible but can be tough to chew.

## Selection

Pumpkin seeds are available in natural food sections of the grocery store. Also called pepitas, these edible seeds are a medium-dark green color (white shell has been removed). Pepitas are sold salted, roasted or raw, with or without hulls. Choose seeds that look healthy and firm, not wilted or shriveled. Check that seeds do not smell rancid or musty.

To harvest seeds, select firm, mature pumpkins or squash that are free of blemishes. Cut the pumpkin in half and scoop out the seeds from the center cavity. Loosen the seeds from surrounding fibers using your fingers or wiping with a paper towel. Yellow-white hulls hold the flat green seed. Discard moldy

or darkened seeds. Varieties that have “hull-less” seeds are often preferred, but any seed is edible. If the shell is very thick and heavy, the hull will need to be removed.

## Storage

Store dried or roasted seeds in an airtight container in the refrigerator, no more than 10 to 14 days. For longer storage, place in the freezer.

## Preparation

Drying seeds and roasting seeds are two different processes. Pumpkin seeds may be dried or boiled before roasting, or roasted fresh. To prepare the seeds for use, separate the fiber from the pumpkin seed. Place the seeds in a colander and rinse thoroughly with water.

## Methods

**Drying**—Carefully wash pumpkin seeds to remove clingy pumpkin fibers. Pumpkin seeds can be dried in the sun for 6 hours or longer, in a dehydrator at 115° to 120°F for 1 to 2 hours, or in an oven on warm for 3 to 4 hours. Stir them frequently to avoid scorching.

**Roasting Dried Seeds**—Toss dried pumpkin seeds with a little oil, salt to taste and roast in a preheated oven at 250°F for 10 to 15 minutes.

**Boiling and Roasting**—In a saucepan bring salted water (2 tablespoons salt to 1 quart water) to a boil. Add rinsed seeds and boil 30 minutes. Drain seeds and dry them on absorbent paper. Place seeds on a shallow pan. Roast in a 300°F oven for 30 to 40 minutes or until golden brown. Stir every 10 minutes.



**Roasting in Microwave**—Pat 1 cup rinsed pumpkin seeds dry with a paper towel. Place 2 tablespoons butter in a microwave-safe dish. Melt on high 30 seconds. Spread seeds in single layer in dish. Microwave on high 7 to 8 minutes, stirring every 2 minutes. Sprinkle with salt or other seasonings.

**De-hulling Seeds**—Hulls can be removed from the seeds after boiling, drying or roasting. Hulls will slip off after seeds have been boiled, or they may be cracked and separated from the seed after drying or roasting. It is a time-consuming process. Hull-less seeds do not have a thick hull that needs to be removed.

**Toasting Hulled Seeds**—Heat a skillet over medium-low heat. Add the seeds. Move the skillet back and forth over the heat or stir constantly. When the seeds begin to pop and have a nutty aroma, they are ready. Salt and enjoy.

### Seasoning Options

Try adding a dash of garlic powder, curry powder or Cajun seasoning to roasted pumpkin seeds.

### Recipes

#### Seed Crackers

¼ cup raw, unhulled sesame seeds  
¼ cup raw pepitas (pumpkin seeds)  
⅓ cup raw sunflower seeds  
¼ cup chia seeds  
½ cup water  
¼ teaspoon salt, optional

Preheat oven to 300°F.

Place chia and sesame seeds in a medium mixing bowl. Stir to combine evenly. Add remaining seeds and mix until evenly distributed.

Stir salt in water until evenly dissolved. Add water to seed mixture; stir well. Let set 5 minutes for the liquid to be absorbed.

Line a baking sheet with parchment. Oil the parchment lightly.

Spread the seed mixture onto the oiled parchment about ¼ inch thick to 8" x 14" rectangle.

Bake in preheated oven 30 minutes. Remove from oven and turn over. Cut into cracker shapes and separate. Bake for another 15 minutes until dry and crunchy. Serve. Store leftovers in an airtight container in a cool dry place.

**Note:** Use fresh seeds for these crisps. Eat soon to prevent the healthy oils in seeds going rancid.

#### Seeds and Spices Crackers

⅓ cup pepitas (pumpkin seeds)  
⅓ cup sunflower seeds  
⅓ cup sesame seeds  
¼ cup poppy seeds  
¼ cup flax seeds  
¼ cup quinoa or millet  
¼ cup buckwheat groats  
¼ cup amaranth  
¼ cup hemp seeds  
¼ cup chia seeds  
1 tsp caraway seeds  
1 tsp fennel seeds  
1 tsp cumin seeds  
1 tsp mustard seeds  
1 tsp onion granulated (optional)  
1 ½ cups warm water

Preheat oven to 300 degrees Fahrenheit.

In a bowl, mix together the variety of seeds and spices with the water. Let the mixture set for an hour for the liquid to be absorbed.

Line a baking sheet with parchment. Oil the parchment lightly.

Spread the seed mixture onto the oiled parchment about ¼ inch thick.

Bake for an hour at 300°F. Break apart when done.

Option: Mix and match the seeds used to equal 2 ¾ cups. MUST use at least ¼ cup chia seeds.

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Julie Cascio, Extension Faculty, Health, Home and Family Development



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