

# STATE AGRICULTURE OFFICIALS ENCOURAGE RESIDENTS AND VISITORS TO CELEBRATE THE PUMPKIN HARVEST

BOSTON – Friday, October 5, 2012 – Massachusetts pumpkin season is once again upon us with 500-plus farms across the state growing pumpkins on over 2,000 acres of land. Valued at approximately \$7.8 million annually, farmers say that thanks to recent weather of dry, cool days and no frost to date has made for a great crop and a plentiful harvest.

This time of year many farms offer tours, walking trails, children's play areas, corn mazes, hayrides, crafts, specialty food items, and seasonal produce to explore and enjoy.

"While other crops are just starting to join in on the pick-your-own experience, for years, pumpkin patches have been central to the fall festivities of families everywhere," said Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources Commissioner Gregory Watson. "Fall is the perfect time to come out with friends and family to enjoy all that our local farms have to offer. Pick that perfect pumpkin, take a hayride, and possibly join a CSA."

To find a pumpkin grower near you, visit <http://www.mass.gov/agr/massgrown/map.htm>.

Pumpkins and other fall ornamentals such as gourds and squash are also available at farmers' markets and road-side stands. Enjoy the autumn weather, the one-of-a-kind flavor, and all of the health benefits the pumpkin has to offer.

A new variety of colors can be seen this year including white, pink, yellow, and green pumpkins. Mark Parlee of Parlee Farms in Tyngsboro says white pumpkins and pumpkins with warts are growing in popularity. He also shares that when you choose a pumpkin, they are usually already cut off from the stem. This is because the pumpkin is ripe and ready around mid-September and would deteriorate if it was left on the vine for too long a time. Pumpkins are then moved from the growing field to a pumpkin patch for better moisture drainage and frost protection.

"Visiting a farm to find that perfect pumpkin creates some of those great family memories," said Mark Parlee. "We try to make the experience memorable by offering a petting zoo, hay play area, warm apple crisp, hot cider, apple cider donuts, and thousands of pumpkins to choose from. Annually, we grow over 40,000 pumpkins and gourds."

Pumpkins are rich in fiber, potassium, calcium, beta-carotene, vitamin A and C, while the seeds are a great source of vitamin E, protein, iron, manganese, and zinc. To maximize your zinc intake, eat the whole unshelled seed. These nutrients and antioxidants are needed for healthy vision, cell and tissue growth and repair, and may also reduce the risk of cancer. Studies have shown that pumpkin seed consumption was associated with a reduced risk of breast and prostate cancers. The pumpkin seed has antibacterial (anti-fungal and anti-viral) properties and may also help diabetics with insulin regulation. The pumpkin's popularity dates as far back as the Aztec times of 1300 AD, and has been used for both culinary and medical purposes in Greece, India, and Asia.

Instead of chucking a pumpkin, use every last bit of this versatile gourd. The flesh, seeds, leaves, and flowers are all edible. The possibilities of its uses are endless: soups, smoothies, and biscuits, to candle holders, dog treats, and facial masks. Small sugar pumpkins are best for baking and any type is great for decorating.

Get creative with fresh pumpkins this fall, and enjoy them frozen, canned, and their seeds all year long.

Try these recipes for spicy jack-o-lantern seeds <http://www.chopchopmag.org/recipes?t=All&i=68>, creamy pumpkin pasta <http://www.bakeyourday.net/creamy-pumpkin-pasta-parmesan-sage/>, pumpkin hummus <http://www.onceuponacuttingboard.com/2011/10/thanksgiving-week-day-2-spicy-pumpkin.html> and pumpkin chili <http://sweetpeaskitchen.com/2012/09/pumpkin-chili/>

DAR's mission is to ensure the long-term viability of agriculture in Massachusetts. Through its four divisions - Agricultural Conservation & Technical Assistance, Agricultural Markets, Animal Health, and Crop and Pest Services - DAR strives to support, regulate and enhance the rich diversity of the Commonwealth's agricultural community to promote economically and environmentally sound food safety and animal health measures, and fulfill agriculture's role in energy conservation and production. For more information, visit DAR's website at [www.mass.gov/agr](http://www.mass.gov/agr), and/or follow at [twitter.com/MDARcommish](https://twitter.com/MDARcommish).

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