

Pumpkin

Apparently the name pumpkin originated from the Greek word for "large melon" which is "pepon." The French changed the name "pompon" the English to "Pumpion" and the Americans to "Pumpkin"... or so the story goes. Having said that, Pumpkins are believed to have originated in North America and traveled to Europe from there, with seeds from closely related plants have been found in Mexico dating back to 7000 to 5500 B.C.

Native American Indians used pumpkin as a regular part of their diets for unknown centuries before the first pilgrims arrived. Various American tribes would roast long strips of pumpkin on an open fire and eat them, but also dried strips of pumpkin skin and wove them into mats. When white settlers arrived, they learnt how to cultivate pumpkins from the Native Americans and it soon became a staple in the diet of the colonists too.

From a modern perspective, the bright orange color of pumpkin is a sign that it is rich in an important antioxidant, called beta-carotene which is also contained in carrots. Beta-carotene is converted to vitamin A in the body and performs many important functions in overall health such as preventing heart disease, some cancers and the degenerative processes associated with aging.

Native Americans also used the potent pumpkin seeds for food. Their successful use of the seeds in the treatment of parasites eventually led to the official listing of pumpkin seeds as a recognized medicine for parasite elimination the United States Pharmacopoeia. Similarly following in their footsteps early American Doctors used pumpkin seeds to treat a variety of kidney problems, urinary tract infections and in the treatment of tapeworms and roundworms. This practice has also found its way into the Australian folk medicine tradition with drovers and shearers using the seeds for the same anti-parasitic purpose, even including the crushed seeds in the food of their dogs!

Another home use of Pumpkin is the use of the flesh in cosmetic preparations, as it apparently makes an excellent facemask. This is because it is high in Vitamin A (skin healing), C (anti-oxidant) and Zinc, and soothes and moisturizes whilst acting as a carrier for other home ingredients such as raw honey, egg white and avocado.

In Macro-biotics Pumpkin is said to tonify the Pancreas through its deep sweet flavour and is employed in the treatment of Diabetes and Hypoglycemia. Regular use has also been said to benefit Asthma, and reduce the cravings for sugar. Perhaps this is an alternative explanation for its use in the Halloween celebrations of Americans!

- The Barefoot Doctor