This seems like the right time to talk about pumpkins. It’s not time to plant them of course but between Halloween and Thanksgiving pumpkins reach the zenith of their popularity. Pumpkins are hardly anyone’s favorite vegetable but maybe they should be. There aren’t too many vegetables that are used in home decorating and a wide range of delicious foods.

Pumpkins belong to the species Cucurbita pepo. Under this banner a number of different varieties exist including the zucchini, acorn, crookneck, straightnecked, marrows, scallop squash and the usually inedible gourd. Who knew? The pumpkin belongs to the largest and most diverse group. From the smallest to the largest (1700+lbs more on this later). They can be smooth or warty, with and without grooves, ribs or furrows. They come in various colors from the familiar orange to white to greens and tans. There are pumpkins for eating and carving and for just the wonder of them. They can be round, flat or look like the air is leaking out of them. The seeds are also edible.

Pumpkins are native to Mexico and the United States. Native Americans domesticated the oldest forms, including the Pumpkin, Acorn and Scallop, while the Europeans recently invented the Zucchini and Cocozelle. Two wild ancestors have been found, C. pepo ssp. fraterna from Mexico and C. pepo ssp. taxana from the United States. Native Americans used the pumpkin for both eating and medicinal purposes. The seeds were used to fight intestinal worms and as a diuretic. Pumpkins could be eaten fresh or dried for long term use. Once the colonists arrived in America they quickly began growing them also. By the mid-16th century pumpkins were common in farmer’s fields. Within a few decades of discovering them pumpkins were available in Europe.

The seeds of all the pumpkins are edible. In fact there are naked-seeded pumpkins that are supposed to be sensational. They are generally green and can be eaten right out of the pumpkin, but by all accounts are better roasted. Not really naked, the seeds do have a coating but it is thin and doesn’t need to be shucked before eating. (Try the varieties Styrian Hulless and Lady Godiva.) The Austrians produce an excellent pumpkin oil from the seeds.

Pumpkins were intercropped with corn and other plants by Native Americans. In America the Connecticut Field Pumpkin
has dominated the market. They are the classic pumpkin found in stores in October. For years it was likely the only pumpkin found in stores, but it isn’t the best choice for eating. For the classic jack-o-lantern, though, it’s perfect.

The jack-o-lantern probably came from the use of carved, hollowed-out turnips and rutabagas that were illuminated and used as a ward against evil spirits. These vegetable lanterns were not associated with Halloween, though. In fact the term Jack-o-lantern wasn’t associated with the vegetable lanterns until 1837 and wasn’t applied to Halloween until 1866. In America a carved pumpkin was part of harvest festivals. There is a long complicated mythology associated with jack-o-lanterns which I am going to leave to you to find. You might check Wikipedia online to find out more.

Pumpkins have the distinction of holding the record for the largest fruit. There are contests around the country vying for the prize of the biggest. This year’s winner and new world record is 1725 pounds, grown by Christie Harp of Ohio. The art of growing giant pumpkins is a complex thing. It involves genetics (the market for giant pumpkins is their seed and not for making pies; start with seeds of the Dill’s Atlantic Giant), and growing culture. It takes massive quantities of compost, water, shade, fertilizer, tender loving care and good luck in terms of weather and making sure it arrives at the contest intact!

(See the current world record holder at: http://www.pumpkinnook.com/giants/giantpumpkins.htm
Also look at http://www.bigpumpkins.com )

Giant pumpkins are not really attractive in many ways (eyes of the beholder kind of thing) in that they look deflated. Oh well, to each their own. The largest pumpkin I could find from Arizona was 469 pounds grown by Bennett Buchsieb of Ahwatukee (south Phoenix), in 2007. The smallest pumpkin contest can be found in Nova Scotia (If you are looking for something interesting but not necessarily edible, try Mongogo du Guatemala or Ronde de Nice. It looks like a round zucchini.

The perfect eating pumpkin may be the Winter Luxury Pie. Gorgeous on the outside, although the white lace on the outside and lack of ribs puts it outside the box for looks, luscious on the inside. It was introduced in 1893 by Johnson and Stokes of Philadelphia.

Cooking a Winter Luxury
Trim off the stem and bake whole, pierced with a few small vent holes. Bake 350°F until it “slumps” and softens. About an hour. The pumpkin is REALLY hot at this point so be careful. Cut open the pumpkin—the seeds and strings should come out easily. Scoop out the flesh. It should come off the rind easily. Puree the flesh in a blender or food processor, adding water if necessary. A 5-lb pumpkin yields approximately 2 1/2 pounds (or 4 cups) of pulp, enough for two pies.

from “The Compleate Squash” by Amy Goldman

Before I move on there are some people that claim that the Pepo moschata is the better eating versus the C. pepo varieties, also know as “Cheese pumpkins.”

If you want to store pumpkins for long periods of time these are the best keepers. Some say they are the worst for eating. Go figure. If you want to try for yourself, Mus-quee de Provence and Sucrine du Berry have good reviews in the Bakers seed catalog. C. moschata prefer hot, humid country. It was originally grown in the West Indies, Central and South America and the American Southwest. They are not tolerant of the cold!

Pumpkin Culture
Pumpkins want the same thing that other squash like: good soil, even watering and lots of sun. Give them a moist rich organic soil. Put them at the edges of the garden as the vines can be quite long and could overwhelm your garden.

Squash bugs are fond of them. If the insect load becomes too large, they can kill the plant. The leaves will start to show brown blotches or become stunted and distorted. You can pick off the bugs by hand. An easy way to collect them is to lay some boards around the vines. The insects like to cluster underneath them. Go out in the early morning and you can gather large quantities quickly.

Another problem is the squash borer. The adult moth lays eggs on the leaves. When the egg hatches the larvae bore into and starts to feed on the vine. The problem is not really noticed until the vine dies. Look for small piles of frass (insect poop) at the base of the vines. They are difficult to control but can be controlled by insecticides before they bore into the vine. Remove the vines and clean up that area of the garden completely. Vines can be composted.

The only problem I had with pumpkins was powdery mildew. Most of the time I would see it late in the monsoon season. Powdery mildew is a whitish fungus on the leaves. Good cultural practices will help reduce the problem.
Plant in full sun, overhead irrigation will inhibit spore germination and good air flow helps reduce the problem. There are some pumpkin varieties that are resistant. Check the information in the catalog or on the packet, it should be listed.

**Pumpkin Facts:**
Pumpkins are native to Central America.
The name pumpkin originated from “pepon” - the Greek work for “large melon”. The French called them “pompon”, the English changed “pompon” to “pumpion” and finally American colonists changed “pumpion” to “pumpkin”.

Colonists sliced off pumpkin tops, removed seeds and filled the insides with milk, spices and honey. This was baked in hot ashes and is the origin of pumpkin pie.

In early colonial times, pumpkins were used as an ingredient for the crust of pies, not the filling.

Pumpkin flowers are edible.

Pumpkins are an excellent source of Vitamin A.

Written by John Begeman, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, the University of Arizona

The Acorn Group
Acorn Squash made their way to Europe after 1492. By the 17th century they were growing squash that look like the modern varieties. The most famous variety is Table Queen and set the standard for today’s market squash. No one knows where it originally came from. It could have been Denmark—it could have been North Dakota. Doesn’t really matter as it ended up in Des Moines, Iowa. For awhile it was known as Des Moines to appease the Des Moines Market Gardeners Association. They tried calling it Des Moines Table Queen but eventually it came to be known just as Table Queen. Another Acorn variety you might want to try is Gill’s Golden Pippin, a bit harder to cut open but supposedly sweeter and nuttier tasting.

The Delicata Group
These are grown for the taste. They are best baked whole or halved. The flesh is fine grained and sweet. Because they have thinner skins than other pumpkins they do not keep as long. Try Sugar loaf and Sweet Dumpling for good eating.

Scallop Group (some are known as patty pans)
As a kid I remember these as being quite common in stores. Now they seem to be a specialty item found occasionally. They are flattened with scalloped edges and can be yellow, green or white. For the most outrageous shape plant Gelber Englischer Custard and for eating Bennings Green Tint and Yellow Bush Scallop.

For all sorts of pumpkin information: http://www.pumpkin-nook.com
For tiny pumpkin seeds: http://www.reimerseeds.com/small-tiny-pumpkins_1276.aspx

For heirloom pumpkin and squash seeds
Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds (great catalog)
www.rareseeds.com
2278 Baker Creek Road
Mansfield, OH 65704

Native Seed/Search
http://www.nativeseeds.org
526 N. 4th Ave. Tucson, AZ 85705

Phone: 520.622.5561
store hours: Mondays thru Saturdays from 10 am - 5 pm
Sundays - Noon to 4 pm

Seed Savers
www.seed savers.org
3094 North Winn Rd, Decorah, Iowa 52101 Phone: (563) 382-5990 and Fax: (563) 382-6511

Southern Exposure Seed Exchange
P.O. Box 460
Mineral, VA 23117
Phone: 540-894-9480
Email: gardens@southernexposure.com
Please include the word “SESE” in your Email’s subject.

Roasted Pumpkin Seeds
All squash seeds are edible even if the squash itself isn’t any good. If you grow the naked-seed pumpkins you won’t have to shell them.

Preheat oven to 350°F. Remove all the stringy fibers from the seeds then wash the seeds well. Blot off excess water. Spread the seeds on a baking pan. Toss with vegetable oil and salt (optional). Roast in the oven until lightly colored, 20-30 minutes depending on the size of the seed. Stir occasionally. Cool. Best used soon after roasting.

The November issue of Organic Gardening magazine has an article on growing winter squash.
Master Gardener Recognition Picnic

Congratulations and Thank You to all the Master Gardeners that participated in our many programs this year.

Service awards went to:

4000 hours—Mary Barnes
2000 hours—Jeanette Teets
1500 hours—Richard Wise
1000 hours—Evelyn Becker, Elinor Benes, Bob Burke, Kathy MacCauley, Herdis MacLellan, Eunice Rickleffs
500 hours—Cynthia Cartier-Roberts, Angella Mazella, Sherry Morton, Janet Schieber, Sue Smith, Tom Watkins, Anna Wilson, Carlon Woodson
150 hours—Debbie Allen, Bev Bostram, Judy Cowan, Ken Earls, Bobbie Jo Gooslin, Michele Herrick, Betty Loos, Jane McGraw, Scotty Miller, Steve Moody, Jean Norris, Jean O’Laughlin, Jackie Rizzo, Paul Schnur, Ginny Shugars, Mary Smith, Linda Sunstad, Karen Wagley

To see more pictures of the picnic go to http://yavapaigardener.blogspot.com and click on the flickr link.
The holidays signal the arrival of a variety of holiday plants, including the striking Amaryllis. You may get one as a gift. If not, give yourself one, as they make a beautiful addition to any indoor garden. Most amaryllis are bought with the intention of throwing them away when the bloom is done but this is one plant that is pretty easy to keep going. They are also one of the easiest to get to bloom.

The plant we are familiar with is a member of the Amaryllis family, but belongs in the genus Hippeastrum (in some catalogs that is how they are listed). Considering the difficulty of getting that name around the tongue, amaryllis may be the easier way to refer to it, but if you are looking for a specific plant it’s always best to use the latin name. No confusion that way.

The plant is a South and Central American native. Some of its close relatives include the Belladonna or Naked Ladies and the Rain Lilies, Zephyranthes. The name Hippeastrum is Greek for “horseman’s star”. The name was chosen in 1837 by a Rev. William Herbert. Nobody seems to know why he named it that, though. One theory is that it resembles a medieval weapon, the morning star. Since Herbert was an expert in medieval history it’s possible, although one does wonder about the thought that went into the decision.

The Dutch were the main hybridizers of the plant, importing several different species in the 18th century. These new hybrids began to show up in America in the early 19th century. Later a large number of hybrids were produced in South Africa. Holland and South Africa still remain the largest growers but growers in other parts of the world are now coming forward with new varieties. All this new interest has resulted in a large range of colors and sizes. Colors include everything from bright reds, to pinks and peaches, green, orange and now ever multi-color stripped ones. They have long strap-like leaves. It’s interesting that most Dutch varieties produce the flower stalk first while the South Africa types produce leaves first. Most times they have one flower stalk but sometimes two will grow. The second one usually has fewer flowers. There are five types available: single flower, double flower, miniature, cybister and trumpet. The cybisters are spider-like; trumpets have flared tube-shaped flowers. Single, doubles and miniatures are the ones you will find in most nurseries. There is a miniature that shows up frequently in catalogs. “Papilio” is actually a species. It has been crossed with other types. The result is interesting striping patterns.

The plants are sold both as bulbs or already blooming. With the proper care these can provide years of beautiful blooms. For blooms in December start bulbs mid to late November. Soak the bulb in tepid water for a few hours before planting. Put into a heavy pot that is just slightly bigger than the bulb. This plant needs to be root bound to bloom. Do not use too big a container. A heavy pot is preferred because the plant can get top heavy. Use regular potting soil. Put soil in the bottom of the pot deep enough so that approximately 1/3 of the bulb is above the rim of the pot. Some triple-super phosphate or bone meal fertilizer mixed in with the soil will improve the bloom. Fill soil around the sides of the bulb. Soak with water. Set in a cool dark place (55°F to 60°F) to encourage root growth. Some sources say to put the plant immediately in the sun. This encourages the leaves to grow. By letting the roots grow first you will have a healthier plant if you want to save it for the long term. Do not water
again till the bulb sprouts in one to two weeks. These are fast-growing plants. Once the plant sprouts, bring it out into the light. Keep it away from direct sun. After the sprout gets to about six inches high, move to a brighter location. Fertilizing while the plant is forming leaves and blooming is important. Keep the potting mixture moist but not soggy. Leaves will usually appear first or with the flowering stalk. After flowering, cut the flower stalk back to two inches, but leave the leaves. As the plant loses some of its visual appeal, move it into a sunny, less prominent location. Amaryllis can be moved outside in the spring. Make sure to pick a shady location. Bring it back inside before first frost. Water and fertilize lightly until the leaves yellow, then withhold water. Allow the bulb to dry out and store in a cool dry place, protected from freezing. Around Thanksgiving, start the cycle over. They are not cold hardy. If you are growing them in the ground in the colder areas of the county you will need to dig them up.

If you want to increase the bulb, try the techniques some growers use. They eliminate the dormant season by repotting the amaryllis, after the bloom is done, into a container 2 inches bigger than the one it is in. When the plant becomes root bound, replant into a larger pot and then again until you are using a 12-inch pot. Lightly fertilize every two weeks. Stake the leaves and wait for the flowers to appear, about one to every four leaves.

So pick up an Hippeastrum (Amaryllis for those not in the know) today and enjoy it years to come.

Sources
Brent and Becky’s Bulbs
7900 Daffodil Lane
Gloucester, VA 23061
(804) 693-3966

Willow Creek Gardens
2521 Oceanside Blvd, Ste A
Oceanside, CA 92054
(760) 721-7079

Gardening Tips
I’ve never had any problem getting carrots to germinate but here’s a tip to improve germination from Organic Gardening magazine.

Loosen your soil and remove any rocks, clods and debris. The soil should be fine and crumbly. Water well. Take the carrot seed and drop a seed, in a row, every inch or so. Press the seeds in the soil with the palm of your hand. This makes sure the seed has good contact with the soil. Cover the seed with a fine layer of compost. Water.

Take burlap or row cover fabric and cut 2 pieces long and wide enough to cover your carrot seeds. Soak with water and spread on the row of seeds pinning in place with U-shaped landscape fabric pins. The fabric keeps the seeds moist.

Check daily for signs of germination. Keep the soil damp and remove the fabric as soon as you see the seedlings.

Want to attract butterflies? Take a shallow bowl of any sort, mix together a little manure and sand and place it into the bowl. Keep it moist but not soggy and add some old fruit to the top. Happy butterfly watching. Or simply impale some fruit on a cactus spine.

Tips from Fine Gardening Magazine:

From a lady in Illinois came the idea of creating your own gardening ornaments. This sounds like fun. She purchases tall vases and candlesticks at thrift shops and glues colorful glass bowls and platters to them to create bright garden mushrooms.

Those thrift shops and yard sales come in handy also when you need trellis. Buy old long handled tools. Just stab them into the ground where you have need and plant the seeds around them.

On the other hand a reader, who didn’t have many trees or shrubs, wrote in Garden Gate magazine that she bought old tools like cultivators, rakes and hoes and stuck the handles in the ground creating perches for birds.

The imagination of people continues to surprise me. Do you have any tips to share. Please let me know.
Recipes

Following is a message from Kathy MacCauley, our Recognition Picnic chair:

To all the Master Gardeners who brought food to our Recognition Picnic, thank you very much! Your scrumptious entrees, sides dishes, and desserts were so enjoyed, people are asking for your recipes! If you brought/made something for the picnic, would you please contact me, so I can make a list of who brought what?

With that said, I will segue into the next request: We’d love to see those recipes in our Master Gardener Cookbook that Robin Weesner is putting together! If there is even ONE ingredient in your recipe that can be grown in Yavapai County, please submit it to Robin. Also, she is capable of substituting or adjusting canned ingredients for fresh, if you feel your recipe may not be suitable to be submitted.

So, all you fabulous cooks, let’s hear from you! We’ve got people out there waiting for your recipes. Thanks again for helping to make this picnic the huge success it was!

Sincerely,

Kathy MacCauley – prescottgirl@qwest.net
Robin Weesner – rgweesner@msn.com

FROM THE EDITOR: Please send or email articles and announcements to the address below. All articles must be in my hands by the 10th of the month. Short announcements (no more than 2 or 3 lines) will be accepted until the 25th.

Nora Graf
PO Box 3652
Camp Verde, AZ  86322
mesquite2@hotmail.com
(928) 567-6703

Jeff Schalau
County Director, Yavapai County Extension Agent,
Agriculture & Natural Resources
email: jschalau@ag.arizona.edu
MG Association Meeting
Nov. 18, 6:30pm

MGA Meeting, Cottonwood, 6:30pm,
Topic: Brain-storming Discussion on
MGA Future