

Column Name- The Heartland Minute

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*“Preserving Pumpkins”*

It’s October! Which means pumpkins are everywhere, including in popular food and drink items. I do love me a pumpkin spiced latte from the coffee shop. When the popular fall treat is used for baking and cooking, sugar or pie pumpkins are the No. 1 choice.

They are smaller than pumpkins used for carving festive jack-o-lanterns. They have dense flesh and high sugar content. The flesh is less stringy and the color is usually darker. When cooking, 1 ¾ cups of mashed fresh pie or sugar pumpkin can replace a 15-ounce can of pumpkin. Home canning is not recommended for any mashed pumpkin or winter squash. The only directions for canning these are for cubed pieces. Mashed products can be safely frozen, according to KSU food scientist, Karen Blakeslee.

Mashed pumpkin or winter squash has a thick density in mashed form which prevents adequate heat transfer to the center of the jar. This can lead to under processing or uneven processing and harmful bacteria can survive after canning. One suggestion is to freeze mashed pumpkin or winter squash as the safest method of preservation.

Some grocery stores sell sugar or pie pumpkins, but Blakeslee recommends looking for U-pick farms that grow pumpkins. Before cutting always rinse the pumpkin with water and scrub the outside to remove any dirt and debris. Check for damage to the rind such as soft spots or spoilage and remove these spots. Happy October, everyone!

Information comes from K-State University food safety specialist, Karen Blakeslee.