



PUMPKINS, SQUASH, AND GOURDS FOR FALL DECORATING

It's time to redecorate our homes and outdoor spaces to embrace the spirit of the season. With the vast selection of pumpkins, squash, gourds, and other natural materials, it couldn't be simpler.

First let's address the question that begs to be asked: what is the difference between a pumpkin, a squash, and a gourd? Does it matter? Pumpkins, squash and gourds are all members of the *Cucurbita* plant family. Some cultivars are commonly referred to as summer squash. These have tender skin and moist flesh. Others are called winter squash. These have hard skin and dry flesh. Pumpkins are *Cucurbita* family members that were typically round and orange. Gourds are defined as hard-skinned fleshy members of the *Cucurbita* family.

So does it matter? Botanically not much, used for culinary purposes maybe so. Winter squash has a milder flavor and finer texture. Pumpkins have a stronger flavor and coarse texture. When you are enjoying your traditional dessert after Thanksgiving dinner, if it was prepared with a commercially

canned product from the grocery store, you may actually be eating squash pie. Topped with whipped cream after the delicious feast, it doesn't make any difference to me!

So whether we call them pumpkins, squash or gourds, they are not just for carving jack-o-lanterns at Halloween and baking pies at Thanksgiving. There are many beautiful and unique varieties that are ideal for fall decorating – inside and out. Here are just a few:



Of all the non-traditional pumpkins, the bluish and greenish-gray varieties are the most unanticipated. Blue Moon and Green Warty are flattened globe-shaped pumpkins. Blue Moon has a smooth but deeply ribbed surface. Green Warty, as its name implies, is covered with large bumps. Either variety looks fantastic when mixed with other

orange pumpkins and are fabulous when placed beside purple-leaved cabbage or

Partner Green Warty with Dynasty Red ornamental cabbage – the combination smolders.

White pumpkins are a versatile choice that can create an eerie or elegant ambience. Who could pass up a variety called Baby Boo? This deeply-ribbed cutie rarely reaches more than 3" across. Valenciano is a flattened, medium-sized pumpkin with a ribbed surface. Full Moon is the 'great white' of pumpkins. White pumpkins are perfectly suited to carve or paint into friendly or ghoulish ghosts, but they can also create an elegant scene in the garden when nestled among fall-blooming annuals and perennials.

You can never have one too many pumpkins, especially if you select the very pretty variety named One Too Many. I have heard their coloring described as a "bloodshot eye", but I don't think this portrayal gives the cream-colored pumpkin with orange red veining justice. It has an overall soft pastel appearance that blends beautifully with other white or orange pumpkins.

If you seek the large and unusual, try Cushaw. Your friends may have never seen this

green, orange, and white mottled oblong winter squash but it's an old favorite from the Caribbean that dates back to the 1800's.

Another heirloom, Turk's Turban is beautiful in autumn displays. Highly decorative and colorful, Turk's Turban has a deep orange cap over an appealing base with red, orange or green markings. I think they look best displayed upside down.

Pumpkins can be traditional in their orange coloring, but have unconventional features. Cinderella and Red Warty Thing are just a couple. Cinderella pumpkins are flattened and deeply ribbed, and their color can range from bright red to orange. All potential princesses should have at least one Cinderella pumpkin nearby in case their fairy godmothers happen by to magically create a carriage ride to the local ball.

While it may not turn into a beautiful carriage, Red Warty Thing is striking. Its lumpy bumpy red skin contributes texture and rich color to pumpkin

groupings. It is also the ultimate witch's face. Carve the eyes and mouth, and insert a small warty gourd for her nose. Add a witch's black hat and broom. Chilling!

At first glance Wolf pumpkins may look like other ordinary pumpkins. But look closer and you will be amazed at the massive stems on these medium-sized pumpkins. Whether stems are utilized as strong handles or pumpkins are placed where their remarkable stems can be appreciated, this is a valuable variety.

So what are you going to do with all these captivating Cucurbitas? Create stunning displays by simply grouping them with Indian corn on straw bales positioned in front of cornstalks. Or include a few in containers to give them seasonal flair. Fill a birdbath with winged gourds. Place a few pumpkins in your perennial borders where color is waning.

Make a centerpiece by using a pumpkin as the vase for a dried

arrangement. Just hollow it out, drop in a block of floral foam, and insert cattails, the seed heads of grasses, coneflowers and sedum.

Use smaller pumpkins to make topiaries. Start with a small container. Cut floral foam to fit and then cover the foam with artificial leaves. Glue three to five pumpkins in graduating sizes. Tie some raffia around the pot – voila!

Making pumpkin candleholders is even easier. Choose the candle and a miniature pumpkin. Trace around the candle on top of the pumpkin and carve out that section. Insert the candle – done! They look as lovely on a deck railing as they do on your dining room table.

Capture the essence of autumn by using Mother Nature's bounty in your seasonal decorating. Traditional orange pumpkins are nice, but there are so many more choices today to spice up your home – inside and out.