

Playing with Pumpkins



Fall is a great time to explore the textures, smells, tastes, sounds, and sights of the season! From apples to pumpkins, cooler air to crunchy fall leaves, getting out and having meaningful experiences in the outdoors is a wonderful way for your child to explore nature with their senses and develop important concepts.

We love pumpkins because they come in so many shapes and sizes! While it's fun to visit a pumpkin patch, it's even easier to explore a pumpkin in your own home. First, position your child so they can look at the pumpkin and touch it with their hands or feet. You can sit behind your child to offer support, or if your child is more independent your child can explore the pumpkin seated in their own chair with a tray or table in front of them.

Give your child the opportunity to feel the entire pumpkin. Your child can touch the hard outer shell of the pumpkin. They can explore the bright orange color, the ridges or bumps on the outside, the size and shape of the pumpkin, its weight, and the stem at the top.

If your child is reluctant to touch the pumpkin, gently guide your child's exploration using hand under hand. "Hop on my hands while we touch this big pumpkin!" Talk about the color of the pumpkin. Maybe the pumpkin has ridges or bumps on the skin. Is your pumpkin big or little? How heavy is your pumpkin? The stem on top is scratchy!

Repetition is very important! Give your child the chance to explore the pumpkin several times (over the course of days or weeks) so they can become familiar with the different "pumpkin" characteristics.

Once your child is comfortable with the outside of a pumpkin, it's time to find out what's inside! Cut a large hole around the pumpkin's stem and allow your child to help pull the top off. Talk about what you may find inside (pumpkin seeds, orange gooey flesh).

Some children will reach right in while others may need to move at a slower pace or require a lot of wait time before touching or feeling the inside of the pumpkin. If your child needs to move at a slower pace, scoop some of the insides out onto a tray or cookie sheet. Again, use hand under hand to show your child how to touch, poke, pat, or squeeze the pumpkin flesh. You can even put the flesh in a Zip-loc bag to smoosh or smash without getting hands messy.

Talk about how stringy and wet the pulp is. It smells sweet! Can you guess how many seeds are in the pumpkin? What do we make with pumpkins on Thanksgiving? When you make pumpkin pie, why does the pumpkin filling come from a can?

Here are some other fun ways to play with a pumpkin:

- Roll a pumpkin across the floor like a ball. Jack Be Little pumpkins are easier for small hands to roll.
- Compare pumpkins and gourds in different shapes and sizes. Use more than one pumpkin - have an uncut pumpkin, a pumpkin with a hole cut but the insides still present, a pumpkin with the hole cut out, but the insides cleaned out.
- Drop a pumpkin and watch what happens. Does it break open? Does it fall with a "thud"?
- Place the pumpkin on different parts of your body or your child's. Is the pumpkin on top of your head, in your lap, or under your arm? Directional concepts such as "left," "right," "in," "out," "on top," and "behind" are important for teaching orientation and mobility.



- Place a container of pumpkin cuts near your child's feet or hands and allow your child to explore the different shapes. Talk about how one side of the pumpkin piece is smooth, and the other side is sticky.
- Fill a container with pumpkin seeds and allow your child to explore the seeds with their hands or feet.
- Float the seeds in water and allow your child to explore how the seeds slip through their fingers. Do the seeds float or sink?
- Bake the cleaned seeds with different flavorings like maple syrup, honey, or pumpkin pie spice. HERE <https://cookieandkate.com/roasted-pumpkin-seeds-recipe/> is a recipe for this tasty, nutritious snack.
- Cut basic shapes into the pumpkin and remove the pumpkin's flesh. Allow your child to explore the holes with their fingers. Be sure to use directional words like "in" and "out" as you narrate out loud how your child is putting their fingers through the holes. Are the holes big or little? One hole might look like a smile with teeth!
- Put the shapes back into the holes of the pumpkin and allow your child to use their fingers to poke the shapes into or out of the pumpkin. Can you make a "pumpkin puzzle"?
- Paint the outside of an un-cut pumpkin with washable paint. Blue and black paint "pop" on the orange surface. To help the paint adhere to the pumpkin, make a 50/50 mixture of school glue and paint so the paint won't flake off when it dries. Your child can also decorate a pumpkin with brightly colored or glittery stickers, googly eyes, or pom poms.
- Cut different shapes of eyes, noses, and mouths out of black construction paper or card stock. Using double-sided tape, make different faces on the outside of an uncut pumpkin. Is your pumpkin happy, sad, or scared? You could say, "Patting pumpkins makes Daddy smile, too!" Or how stopping this activity makes you and your child feel sad.
- Read the poem "Five Little Pumpkins" out loud, using five Jack Be Little Pumpkins.
- Make pumpkin pie play dough together. This sensory experience is filled with smells, textures, sounds, bright colors, and even a taste or two.



Five Little Pumpkins

Five little pumpkins sitting on a gate.
The first one said, "Oh my, it's getting late."
The second one said, "There are bats in the air."
The third one said, "But we don't care."
The fourth one said, "Let's run and run and run."
The fifth one said, "I'm ready for some fun."
"Oo-oo!" went the wind and out went the light.
And the five little pumpkins rolled out of sight.