

Let's Make Pumpkin Pie Play Dough



Sweet as pumpkin pie! Making pumpkin pie play dough with your child is a sensory experience filled with smells, textures, sounds, bright colors, and maybe even a taste or two. Plus, it's always fun to make something together while your child learns new concepts and perhaps tries to poke, roll, or pat the dough.

Duration

This activity will take 10 to 30 minutes depending on your child's mood and interest.

Materials Required

- One 15 oz. can of pumpkin puree
- Three tablespoons pumpkin pie spice
- Two to three cups of corn starch

- Large mixing bowl. You might consider a metal one to increase reflection if your child likes things that are shiny. It will also give different feedback in the areas of touch and hearing. You might also consider a bowl that contrasts with the orange pumpkin and white corn starch if your child has functional vision.
- Mixing spoon. Use metal or wood depending on your child.
- Measuring cups in different sizes
- Optional: Something to put under your child to collect the corn starch, pumpkin, or play dough that falls to the floor. You might want to put something on the counter, table, or surface where the child is making or playing with the dough.

Activity Steps

1. Gather the ingredients, a large mixing bowl, measuring cups, a mixing spoon, and a tablespoon. What do they feel like? Are their textures rough or smooth? Does the mixing bowl feel warm or cold? What happens when you bang the utensils together or against the bowl?
2. Empty the can of puree into the bowl and mix in the pumpkin pie spice. What does it smell like? What does the puree feel like? Wet? Cold? Does the pumpkin puree make any sounds when you stir it? Talk about the bright orange color. Does the color “pop” in your bowl?
3. Slowly add the corn starch one-half to one cup at a time. Is the mixture hard or easy to stir? Listen for any sounds the mixture makes when you stir it and talk about what you’re doing. If any corn starch spills on your work surface, let your child touch it with their hands or feet. Trace some shapes. Is the cornstarch soft and silky or does it feel coarse and crumbly? How can you create visual contrast? Corn starch on a dark surface is easier to see than on a light-colored surface. Similarly, orange dough on a white plate is easier to see than on a red plate.
4. Keep adding corn starch until you have the same consistency as store-bought play dough. Form the dough into a ball. Let your child watch you stir and mix the dough. Talk about how you’re forming the ball of dough. Use action words like “stir,” “scoop,” “mix,” and “knead” to label what you and your child are doing. Allow your child to help you make the ball. Let your child place their hands over yours as you roll the dough.
5. Now put your ball of dough on your worktable. What does it feel like? Is it sticky? Soft? Smoosh the dough. Poke it. Smash it and listen to the sound it makes. What does the dough smell like? Pumpkin? Cinnamon? Cloves? Talk about the different scents that create pumpkin pie. Have fun making handprints or footprints. Feet are less tactilely

sensitive than hands, and new sensory experiences can be easily introduced through the feet.

6. Be creative! Roll the dough out and use cookie cutters to make different shapes.
7. This dough is safe to eat and it's gluten free. Give it a lick or a bite. What does it taste like?
8. When you're done playing, put the dough in an airtight bag in the refrigerator. It will keep for two to three days. When you play with it again, you might need to add a very small amount of water to it.

Tips

- Don't ever force your child to touch anything they don't want to or to participate if they don't want to. If they are hesitant to touch with their hands, they might touch with their feet. It might be just enough for them to be present, smelling the pumpkin and the spices and hearing the cooking and patting sounds for the first time.
- Use hand-under-hand to give the child more control and encourage participation.
- This experience might be a bit messy depending on your child's interests and movements. Observe your child's reactions. Is the messiness too overwhelming? If so, you can consider having a cloth nearby to clean as you go. You can also reduce other auditory distractions.
- You can start by making the play dough ahead of time and just let your child play with it to introduce the smell and texture first. Then try making the recipe together.

Extension Activities

- Introduce cookie cutters, rolling pins, and toys you can roll over the dough like play cars and trucks. Try using different tools like plastic knives or a pair of child scissors to cut the play dough.
- Make balls and snakes out of the dough. Encourage your child's imagination and build a snowman, a house, or whatever they would like.
- Smoosh the play dough into a pancake or pizza. Decorate the pancake or pizza.
- Visit a pumpkin patch or grocery store to pick out a pumpkin. Talk about where pumpkins come from. Feel the stem and the pumpkin skin. At home, carve an opening and smell and touch the inside. Compare the smell of the actual pumpkin to the can of pumpkin. Compare how both kinds of pumpkin feel to the touch.
- Read a book about pumpkins, such as these favorites: You're My Little Pumpkin Pie by Natalie Marshall, Apples and Pumpkins by Anne Rockwell, or The Itsy Bitsy Pumpkin by Sonali Fry.
- Read the poem "5 Little Pumpkins" and incorporate some finger play.

Five Little Pumpkins

Five little pumpkins sitting on the gate.

The first one said, "Oh, my, it's getting late."

The second one said, "There are witches in the air."

The third one said, "But I don't care."

The fourth one said, "Let's run and run and run."

The fifth one said, "I'm ready for some fun."

Ooooo! Went the wind, and out went the light.

And the five little pumpkins rolled out of sight!

