

## The Pumpkins are Coming!

### Food for Thought September, 2011

---

### In This Issue

Floating Pumpkins  
Volunteers Needed  
Pumpkin Activity links  
Pumpkin Books

---

### Pumpkin Facts

- The pumpkin is the state fruit of New Hampshire, thanks to students from Harrisville who lobbied the NH Legislature in 2006.
- Pumpkins originated in Central America. Seeds from related plants have been found in Mexico, dating back over 7,000 years to 5500 B.C.
- The name pumpkin originated from "pepon" - the Greek word for "large melon." Native Americans called pumpkins "isqoutm," their word for "squash."
- The pumpkin is one of only a few foods we still eat today that is native to North America.
- The Pilgrims and other early New England settlers liked to use pumpkins, because uncut pumpkins would keep for several months, if stored in a cool, dry place. Pumpkins were a main part of the early settlers' daily diet.
- Colonists made the first pumpkin pies by slicing off pumpkin tops, removing the seeds and filling the insides with milk, spices and honey, then baking it all in hot ashes. Pumpkins were

### Greetings,

Well, it happened again, summer has flown by and we are starting a new school year. It's an exciting time for teachers, students and for us at NHAITC too. To start the year off right we are launching a new and improved website with an updated list of our resources and activities. Please check it out ([www.nhagintheClass.org](http://www.nhagintheClass.org)) and return frequently to stay connected with what we are doing around the state. Also, let us know what you think of the new look and format.

You can also connect with us on Facebook (New Hampshire Agriculture in the Classroom) and Twitter (NHAgintheClass) so if you are inclined to use these forms of communication, be sure to hook up with us there.

In this issue we are providing some resources for teaching with and about pumpkins so you can start preparing for October. This largest member of the squash family is ever popular with children and provides fertile ground for integrating agriculture into math, science, history, geography, language arts; really any area of study. You'll also find a wonderful story from our Grafton County Coordinator about how pumpkins created a "teachable moment" and caught the attention of students in Haverhill last fall.

If you have any great stories of how agriculture has sparked an excitement for learning with students you work with or know, let us hear about it. We love featuring success stories in our newsletters.

Be sure to check out our Volunteers Needed article to learn how you or someone you know might engage with NHAITC in a deeper way.

Good luck with the start of a new school year. We look forward to working more directly with a growing number of you in the coming months.

Best wishes,

*Ruth*

Ruth Smith, State Coordinator

---

also used as an ingredient for the crust of pies.

- Pumpkins were used for many different things. Dried pumpkin shells served as bowls or containers for storing grains and seeds. Native Americans flattened strips of pumpkins, dried them and made mats from them.
- Native Americans used pumpkin seeds for food and medicine.
- The pumpkin is a vegetable, but most pumpkins grown today are sold for decorating and carving.
- Pumpkins range in size from less than a pound to over 1,000 pounds.
- Some pumpkins are gray or pale green, but most are yellow or orange. Some are even white.
- Pumpkins are 90 percent water, high in fiber and contain potassium and Vitamin A.
- Pumpkin flowers are large and yellow. They are also edible.
- Pumpkins are cucurbits, related to cucumbers, squash, melons and gourds.
- Eighty percent of the pumpkin supply in the United States is available in October.
- The tradition of carving pumpkins at Halloween started with the Irish, but the original jack-o-lanterns were made from turnips. When the Irish immigrated to the U.S., they found pumpkins a plenty, and they were much easier to carve.
- The town of Goffstown, New Hampshire, holds an annual pumpkin regatta each October, in which giant pumpkins are hollowed out to make room

## Floating Pumpkins

Last October it made the front page of the *Valley News*, headlines on WMUR-TV and it hit the hearts of children at the Haverhill Cooperative Middle School. What was the event? Heavy rains flooded a farmer's field across the Connecticut River in Vermont and an estimated 100,000 pumpkins were washed downstream. NH Agriculture in the Classroom's Grafton County Coordinator, Deb Robie reflects on the impact that this event had on local students and how it provided an opportunity for real life learning. Flooding this season has had severe impacts on local farms as well. Our hearts go out to all the farmers who have been affected.

### Floating Pumpkins by Deb Robie

Take a room full of young minds, throw in a record setting rain, lots of bright orange pumpkins floating down the river and what do you get? A beautiful example of how to bring Agriculture into the Classroom!

One day a local teacher asked me if I had any information on the financial impact that the Connecticut River flooding would have on a local pumpkin farm. The story was big news in our area and many children were worried about where their pumpkins would come from to make their Halloween Jack-O-Lanterns. So the question turned into a big research project for the fifth grade class at Haverhill Cooperative Middle School. Letters of concern were written to the farmer; discussions were held and research was conducted about the water cycle, the flooding history for the river, soil erosion, soil fertility concerns, and marketing. This was "real" world stuff for these young people and they began to see their connection to agriculture in a whole new way.

With resources from NH Ag in the Classroom (NHAITC) I was able to quickly pull together information for the teacher so she could help students find answers to their questions. For me, the greatest part of this project was watching the students discover new facts about growing pumpkins. They discovered the whole story of how crops are grown and how weather plays such a crucial role in food production. I stopped in to see the teacher a few weeks later and she showed me the book the students had put together about the whole experience. Poems, pictures, graphs, references to the pumpkin books that I had sent to them were all included.

In my book any time you can use science, math, social studies, economics, health, language arts, and fun in one

for a single passenger, then fitted with trolling motors and paraded on the Piscataquog River.

## Calendar

**Join NHAITC at the events in red.**

**9/9-11: Hillsborough County Ag Fair**  
<http://hcafair.synthasite.com>

**9/10-11: Little Nature Museum's NatureFest at Gould Hill Farm**  
[www.littlenaturemuseum.org](http://www.littlenaturemuseum.org)

**9/16-25: Rochester Fair**  
[www.rochesterfair.com](http://www.rochesterfair.com)

**9/27: Belknap County School to Farm Day**

**9/17: Wool Day at Canterbury Shaker Village**  
[www.shakers.org](http://www.shakers.org)

**9/23: NH Day at the Big E**  
[www.TheBigE.com](http://www.TheBigE.com)

**9/29-10/2: Deerfield Fair**  
[www.deerfieldfair.com](http://www.deerfieldfair.com)

**10/7: NEA-NH Fall Conference**  
[www.neanh.org](http://www.neanh.org)

**10/7-9: Milford Pumpkin Fest**  
[www.milfordpumpkinfestival.org](http://www.milfordpumpkinfestival.org)

**10/8-10: Sandwich Fair**  
[www.thesandwichfair.com](http://www.thesandwichfair.com)

**10/15-16: Goffstown Giant**

school project that is a great thing.

---

## Volunteers Needed

### Outreach Docents

We say "yes" as often as possible to requests to come to schools, libraries and youth centers to deliver programs related to agriculture. But we'd like to be able to do that more. In order to reach more children, we need more instructors. We are planning to offer a series of training sessions for anyone who would like to become an Ag in the Classroom Docent. These individuals will assist our outreach efforts and help us increase the agricultural literacy of NH's children. They may also be called upon to help staff our display booths at various events such as the Farm & Forest Expo or other fairs and venues. The training will begin in January and include sessions on how to work with different ages of children as well as content material for various agricultural topics. Anyone who is interested in participating in this training should contact us at: [nhaitc@nhfarmbureau.org](mailto:nhaitc@nhfarmbureau.org) or call 224-1934.

### Educators for the Board

New Hampshire Agriculture in the Classroom is a non-profit organization with a volunteer board of directors. This board is made up of representatives from various farm commodity groups (dairy, sheep, vegetables and fruit, beekeepers, etc.), agencies and organizations (NH Departments of Ag., Education, UNH Extension, NH Farm Bureau, Future Farmers of America and more) and educators. However, we are interested in getting some additional educators to join us and provide insight to daily classroom needs. If you are currently teaching, are dedicated to helping students understand and appreciate agriculture and have a bit of free time, please contact us about joining the board or a specific committee. We are entering a new phase of growth and count on input from our primary audience of educators to help us grow in the right direction.

---

## Pumpkin Activities

There are so many ways to use pumpkins as teaching tools. Our Ag in the Classroom colleagues around the country have developed some universally useful lessons which can be downloaded for free. See below for the links.

## **Pumpkin Weigh-Off & Regatta**

[www.goffstownmainstreet.org](http://www.goffstownmainstreet.org)

## **10/22: Keene Pumpkin Festival**

[www.pumpkinfestival2011.org](http://www.pumpkinfestival2011.org)

## **10/23-24: NH Science Teachers Fall Conference**

[www.nhsta.net](http://www.nhsta.net)

## **11/19: Upper Valley Farm to School Conference**

[www.uvfts.org](http://www.uvfts.org)

**Do you know of an ag. related event that we should list in our calendar? Let us know:**

[nhaitc@nhfarmbureau.org](mailto:nhaitc@nhfarmbureau.org)

## **Contacts**

### **NH Ag in the Classroom:**

Ruth Smith, State

Coordinator

[nhaitc@nhfarmbureau.org](mailto:nhaitc@nhfarmbureau.org)

603-224-1934

295 Sheep Davis Road

Concord, NH 03301

Deb Robie, Grafton County  
Coordinator

[wehunt4@paigecos.com](mailto:wehunt4@paigecos.com)

### **NH pumpkin growers:**

Pumpkin Patches & More

[www.pumpkinpatchesandmore.org](http://www.pumpkinpatchesandmore.org)

NH Giant Pumpkin Growers  
Association

[www.nhgpga.org](http://www.nhgpga.org)

Alabama Agriculture in the Classroom has created a thematic unit which integrates pumpkins into math, language arts, science, music, health and art lessons.

<http://www.alabamaaitc.org/uploadedFiles/File/pumpkinpatch.pdf>

Oregon Agriculture in the Classroom offers a series of math related activities for grades 2-5:

[http://aitc.oregonstate.edu/resources/pdf/activity/pumpkins\\_activity1.pdf](http://aitc.oregonstate.edu/resources/pdf/activity/pumpkins_activity1.pdf)

[http://aitc.oregonstate.edu/resources/pdf/activity/pumpkins\\_activity2.pdf](http://aitc.oregonstate.edu/resources/pdf/activity/pumpkins_activity2.pdf)

[http://aitc.oregonstate.edu/resources/pdf/activity/pumpkins\\_activity3.pdf](http://aitc.oregonstate.edu/resources/pdf/activity/pumpkins_activity3.pdf)

Oklahoma Agriculture in the Classroom pumpkin lessons have a few facts which are specific to their state, but most of the information is universal enough to apply to NH. There is quite a bit of information about the history of pumpkins and squash and the differences between some of the varieties in this family of plants. They even mention NH in one of the lessons because of Goffstown's annual pumpkin regatta!

<http://www.agweb.okstate.edu/fourh/aitc/lessons/cucurbits.pdf>

---

## **Pumpkin Books**

Here are a few story books that use pumpkins as a theme or teach about pumpkins.

*Pumpkin Circle: The Story of a Garden* by George Levenson

This award winning book is illustrated with photographs and has a companion video to go with it. Together they teach about the biology of pumpkins and the cycle of growing plants. Starting with seeds and completing the circle with decomposition, this book covers it all in a simple and beautiful way. Appropriate for grades K-5.

*Pumpkins* by Jacqueline Farmer

This book is full of facts about growing and using pumpkins, as well as some of their history and mystery. The book also contains some recipes for cooking with pumpkin and plenty of websites and other books for additional resources. Appropriate for grades 1-3.

*Pumpkins* by Mary Lyn Ray (NH Author)

This is a story about conservation as much as it is about pumpkins. A man grows pumpkins to make enough money to protect his land from being developed. He loves his land and his pumpkins and shares that love throughout the world. Pumpkins are the messengers and tools for

connecting people to the earth. Appropriate for grades 2-6.

*Too Many Pumpkins* by Linda White

This is a story book about an old woman and her distaste for pumpkins, until she learned how they could help create community and joy. Appropriate for grades 1-4.