

How To Carve a Pumpkin

13 Expert Tips for Carving a Perfect Pumpkin from Better Homes and Gardens Deputy Art Director Scott Johnson gives us the scoop on how to carve the perfect pumpkin this Halloween.

1. **Pick with purpose.** Know how you want to design your jack-o'-lantern before picking your pumpkin so you know what size and shape to look for. "If you're going to do more detailed carving, it's often easier to carve if you pick a pumpkin with a flatter surface," Johnson says.



2. **Stop at the store.** You don't have to hit the [pumpkin patch](#) to find a great gourd. Swing by a grocery or department store for a wide variety of [pumpkins](#) waiting to be carved. Avoid pumpkins with surface rotting or soft spots. But don't be scared if they're dirty, as long as the pumpkins are firm and have solidly attached stems you're good to go.

3. **Don't make the cut -- yet.** Wait to carve your pumpkin until two or three days before Halloween. "Pumpkins soften quickly," Johnson says. "The more surface you cut away, the faster it's going to get soft and fall apart."

4. **Clean and cut.** After waiting, rinse off the pumpkin and use a sturdy knife to cut an opening in the top. Johnson recommends cutting a round lid with

a triangular notch. "Without a notch, it can be hard to fit the lid back in when you're done," Johnson says.

5. **Start scraping.** Use a large cooking spoon to remove your pumpkin's pulp and seeds. To make the messy job quicker and easier, Johnson recommends using a stainless-steel spoon, which holds up to the pulp much better than plastic. "Just scrape the surface of the walls," Johnson says. "Avoid digging into the walls too much or they're more apt to cave in."
6. **Stay in the sink.** Remove pumpkin pulp in the [kitchen](#) sink for quick and easy cleanup -- no more soggy newspapers! Just remember, don't put the pulp in your [garbage disposal](#). "It'll ruin it," Johnson says.
7. **Save the seeds.** Johnson looks forward to baking [pumpkin seeds](#) with his family every year. "They're a great snack," Johnson says. Check out one of his [favorite recipes](#).
8. **Draw your design.** Use washable markers to draw the design you want on your pumpkin. Once you're done carving, wash off the remaining marks with a damp cloth.
9. **Use a filet knife.** For a classic Halloween jack-o'-lantern, a store-bought kit isn't necessary. Use a long, thin knife to carefully carve your pumpkin. If you're cutting simple shapes, Johnson suggests pushing the pieces out from the inside -- pushing them into the pumpkin causes breaks and tears.

10. **Try a unique tool.** Use an [apple corer](#) to punch through the pumpkin's rind to create a perfectly round hole. "It's so easy -- you just push the apple corer through and pull it out," Johnson says. For an easy, sophisticated twist, buy three different-colored pumpkins, and mix and match the plugs. For this technique, you don't have to remove the pulp. "It's a mess-free way to come up with a cool look that lasts a lot longer," Johnson says.
11. **Add some depth.** Even simple designs can be dazzling with some extra dimension. Scrape the surface skin off for a different level of light. "You can get a lot of variation depending on how deep you make the cuts," Johnson says. He recommends using linoleum knives and clay tools for this effect.
12. **Creepify your pumpkin.** Save some of the gutted seeds and pulp and let them hang out of your jack-o'-lantern's mouth for a fun and scary look. Johnson also likes saving the cut-out pieces and using [toothpicks](#) to stick them on different areas of the pumpkin's surface.
13. **Keep it fresh.** Avoid shriveled and discolored pumpkins by trying Wilt-pruf, an organic mix made to spray on evergreen trees so the trees don't lose moisture in the winter. Spray Wilt-pruf (available at nurseries and garden centers) inside the walls of your jack-o'-lantern's nose, eyes, and mouth to prevent moisture loss.