



# TURNING INTO A PUMPKIN!

**Every** year in October millions of pumpkins are gutted, decorated, and crushed in America. It's a strange tradition if you think about it because in the rest of the world pumpkins are *food*.

Have no fear. There is more to pumpkin than pie and this meal plan gets down to it. I wanted to show how it's possible to make savory, delicious dishes with pumpkin and the key is starting with fresh, roasted pumpkin. Can you use canned pumpkin for the recipes? Yes, with one exception. The pumpkin fajitas really do need the real thing.

# Macheesmo Meals

## Helpful Equipment:

- Baking Sheet
  - Cast Iron Skillet (12-inch is nice)
  - Non-stick Skillet
  - Mortar and Pestle
- or
- Spice Grinder



You can click on these to zap you to Amazon and see my recommendation for each.

## MEAL 1

- Pumpkin Grilled Cheese
- Escarole Salad

## MEAL 2

- Pumpkin Orzo
- Autumn Skirt Steak

## MEAL 3

- Pumpkin Fajitas

## BRUNCH!

- Roasted Pumpkin Seeds
- Pumpkin Pie Crepes

## PRE MEALS | Roasted Pumpkin

To be honest, I don't love pumpkin by itself. I think it's excellent in other dishes like the ones in this plan, but I never really consider roasting it to be an actual meal. Roasting a few pumpkins on a lazy Sunday though is a great way to cut down on meal prep time for the rest of the week.

I recommend using smaller pumpkins to roast. Try to stay in the 2-3 pound range. If they get much larger than that I find that the flesh gets really stringy and it doesn't work well in recipes. Leave those for the carvings!

If you are planning to make every meal in this plan for a family of four, you probably need to roast three small pumpkins. Or you could do two and use canned pumpkin for one or two of the recipes (the crepes and the orzo work best with canned).

### How to Roast a Pumpkin(s)

#### Ingredients:

- Small baking pumpkins, halved
- Olive oil
- Kosher salt

#### Directions:

- 1) Preheat oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit. Cut pumpkins in half down the middle with a large chef's knife. The best way to do this is to lay the pumpkin on a sturdy cutting board and then carefully stab the pumpkin with a large chef's knife so the point of the knife is going down into the cutting board. Then you can just press the knife down and it will cut through halfway through the pumpkin. Repeat on the other side and you should be good to go.
- 2) Use a spoon to scoop out seeds from pumpkins. Save them for roasting! Drizzle the inside of the pumpkin with a tiny amount of olive oil and season it with a pinch of salt.
- 3) Roast the pumpkins, skin-side up on a baking sheet until the pumpkin flesh is very tender, about 45 minutes, but could be more depending on the size of your pumpkins.



#### Make It a Meal

Like I said, I rarely serve pumpkin on its own, but if you wanted to do it, slice the pumpkin into 1-inch pieces and drizzle them all with oil. I like to season them with some salt, pepper, and chili powder and roast them until the slices are tender, about 25 minutes.



#### Choosing a Pumpkin

**BIG NOTE:** Trying to eat a large pumpkin that is intended for carving will be disappointing. Look for pumpkins labeled for baking or "pie pumpkins".

When picking a pumpkin, look for ones that are under three pounds and have a firm, uniform skin. Avoid pumpkins with a lot of bruises and if they are super-shiny, it means they were maybe picked too soon.



## MEAL 1 | Pumpkin Grilled Cheese and Salad

This is one of my favorite grilled cheeses of all time. It's a super-fast dinner and totally filling. The escarole salad has a nice bite to it and cuts some of the richness of the grilled cheese.

### Pumpkin Grilled Cheese

Yield: 4 Servings | Time: 20 min.

#### Ingredients:

- 2 cups pureed pumpkin (1/2 cup per sandwich)
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 8 slices sourdough bread
- 8 ounces gruyere cheese, grated

#### Directions:

- 1) If you are working with roasted pumpkin, scoop out enough to measure 2 cups and mash roughly with a fork.
- 2) Stir together brown sugar and spices in a small bowl.
- 3) Butter one side of each piece of bread. Add buttered side of one piece to a large skillet over medium heat.
- 4) Spread 1/2 cup of pumpkin evenly over the bread. Sprinkle generously with spice mixture. Top with grated cheese. Add top piece of bread, buttered side up.
- 7) Cook sandwich over medium heat for about 5 minutes per side until the bread is nicely browned and the cheese melted.

Cut and serve immediately!

**NOTE:** I like to use about a tablespoon of butter per sandwich, but you could probably get away with a little less.

### Escarole Salad

Yield: 4 Servings | Time: 10 min. + onion time

#### Ingredients:

*Simple Marinated Red Onions:*

- 1 red onion, sliced thin
  - 1/3 cup red wine vinegar
  - 1/3 cup water
  - 1 tablespoon kosher salt
  - 1 tablespoon sugar
  - 1 teaspoon hot sauce
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- 1 head escarole, washed and chopped
  - 2 tablespoons olive oil
  - 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
  - Crushed black pepper

#### Directions:

- 1) For onions, slice a whole onion into thin rings. In a small bowl, stir together other five ingredients and toss onions. Cover and let sit for at least 30 minutes but longer is better.
- 2) Wash escarole well and chop. Divide between plates or serve on one large plate.
- 3) Arrange marinated onions over escarole and sprinkle the salad with a tablespoon or two of the marinating liquid and olive oil.
- 4) Sprinkle salad with Parmesan cheese and crushed black pepper.



### Plan This Meal!

Do Ahead - Marinate the onions for the salad in advance if you can.

20 minutes ahead - Mash pumpkin and prepare grilled cheese ingredients.

15 minutes ahead - Start cooking grilled cheeses.

5 minutes ahead - Assemble salad and serve!

### Cooking Grilled Cheeses

Grilled cheese sandwiches can be trickier than you might think. You want the sandwich bread to be perfectly browned and crispy right when the cheese is gooey and delicious.

To master this, cook the sandwiches in a skillet over medium to medium-low heat. It's always easier to turn up the heat later so start it fairly low.

If you're cooking a bunch of sandwiches, you can keep them warm in a 250 degree oven while you work on others.



## MEAL 2 | Pumpkin Orzo and Autumn Skirt Steak

I haven't included many steak recipes in the meal plans to date because steak is expensive and usually something I save for special occasions. I couldn't pass it up with this orzo though. It pairs too perfectly.

### Pumpkin Orzo

**Yield:** 4 Servings | **Time:** 30 min.

#### Ingredients:

- 8 ounces orzo, cooked al dente
- 1/2 white onion, diced
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 1/2 cups pumpkin puree
- 2 cups vegetable stock
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1/4 cup Parmesan cheese, grated
- Salt and pepper

#### Directions:

- 1) Cook orzo according to package. Be careful not to overcook the pasta.
- 2) In a large skillet, add butter and diced onion over medium heat. Cook until onion starts to soften.
- 3) Add pumpkin puree to skillet along with veggie stock. Stir together and bring to a simmer. The stock should thin the puree substantially. Let simmer for a few minutes to thicken slightly.
- 4) Toss in cooked orzo, cream, Parmesan, and season with salt and pepper.
- 5) Keep warm over low heat until ready to serve.

### Autumn Skirt Steak

**Yield:** 4-6 Servings | **Time:** 30 min.

#### Ingredients:

- 2 pound skirt steak
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon ground allspice
- 2 tablespoons olive oil

#### Directions:

- 1) Stir together spices in a small bowl.
- 2) Generously rub the spice mixture on both sides of the skirt steak. You might not need all of it, but you can be very generous with it. It's best to do this at least an hour in advance so steak can absorb the flavors.
- 3) When ready, to cook, preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Heat a large cast iron skillet over medium-high heat.
- 4) Once hot, drizzle steak with oil on both sides and rub it in. Add steak to skillet and sear for 3 minutes per side to create a nice crust on the steak.
- 5) Transfer steak to oven and roast for 6-8 minutes until steak is medium rare. If you have a meat thermometer, you are shooting for 135 degrees F. in the thickest part of the steak.
- 6) Remove steak from oven and let rest for 5 minutes, then slice thin across the grain. Serve over orzo!



### Plan This Meal!

In Advance - Make spice rub and rub steak.

30 minutes ahead - Cook orzo and prepare other orzo ingredients.

20 minutes ahead - Sear steak and start cooking onions for orzo.

15 minutes ahead - Transfer steak to oven to finish cooking. Add pumpkin and stock to skillet for orzo.

5 minutes ahead - Rest and slice steak. Combine orzo ingredients and season.



### Go Against the Grain

When you're cooking flank or skirt steak, you'll notice that there are long fibers in the steak that run the length of the steak. When you slice the steak (after resting it), you want to cut across these fibers which will make each bite really tender and delicious.



### A Veggie Option

Mushrooms and pumpkin go really well together. If you aren't a steak fan, toss some sliced cremini mushrooms with the spice rub for the steak along with a drizzle of olive oil. Sear them until they are browned and serve them over the orzo!

## MEAL 3 | Pumpkin and Poblano Fajitas

The pumpkin in these tacos is almost more filling than a meat in my opinion. A few of these can easily make a meal, especially if you serve it with chips and salsa or something. Unfortunately, you just can't use canned pumpkin for these though. The tacos really need the roasted, cubed pumpkin.

### Roasted Pumpkin Fajitas

Yield: 12 fajitas | Time: 30 min.

#### Ingredients:

- 1 small pumpkin, roasted, peeled and cubed (about 3 cups)
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 poblano peppers, seeded and sliced thin
- 1 small red onion, sliced thin
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 12 flour tortillas, 8 inch size
- 2 avocados, sliced
- 6 ounces pepper jack cheese
- Chopped lettuce, garnish
- Sour cream, garnish
- Cilantro, garnish
- Hot sauce, garnish

#### Directions:

- 1) Peel roasted pumpkin with a paring knife. It's easier to peel when it is cool actually. Cube roasted pumpkin into 1/4-inch cubes.
- 2) In a large seasoned cast iron skillet or non stick skillet, add olive oil over medium-high heat. Then add pumpkin, sliced poblano, and sliced onions.
- 1) Season the pumpkin mixture with a pinch of salt, cumin, and chili powder. Cook until the veggies are slightly charred, but soft, and the pumpkin is getting crispy around the edges. This will take 7-8 minutes.
- 2) Heat flour tortillas in the microwave for a few seconds so they loosen up. Then spoon some sour cream onto each tortilla. Top fajitas with pumpkin mixture, avocados, pepper jack cheese, lettuce, fresh cilantro, and a squeeze of lime.
- 5) Serve these as soon as possible. If you don't feel like these will make a full meal, serve them with some chips and salsa!



#### Plan This Meal!

In advance - Be sure to roast the pumpkin in advance for these fajitas. Otherwise add an hour onto the prep time.

30 minutes left - Peel roasted pumpkin, slice onions and poblanos, and prep other toppings.

15 minutes left - Starting cooking fajita filling.

5 minutes left - Warm up flour tortillas and assemble fajitas or let people make their own!



#### Roasting a Pumpkin Sucks

Roasting a whole pumpkin or two is super easy, but if you just aren't a planner and have zero interest in that, you can actually peel an uncooked pumpkin with a good vegetable peeler or paring knife.

Then you can scoop out the guts with a spoon and cube the uncooked pumpkin into 1/4-inch cubes. Add these to your skillet over medium heat and cook them for 6-7 minutes with a splash of water until the pumpkin softens. Then add in the other ingredients and continue cooking the fajitas. This will totally work as long as you feel comfortable peeling a pumpkin.

# PUMPKIN LEFTOVERS | Roasted Seeds and Crepes

These are two must have recipes for me during the fall. For one, you will almost inevitably have some pumpkin seeds in your house at some point in the next week. Do not throw them out! Roast them as directed here for some addictive snacks. The crepes are a great way to use a small amount of leftover pumpkin!

## Pumpkin Pie Crepes

**Yield:** 4 crepes | **Time:** 40 min.

### Ingredients:

#### Basic Crepe Batter:

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 1/2 cups milk
- 2 large eggs
- 2 tablespoons melted butter
- Walnuts, toasted for garnish
- Powdered sugar, garnish

#### Pumpkin Pie Filling:

- 1 1/2 cups pumpkin puree
- 1/2 cup milk
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/4 teaspoon ground clove
- 1/4 teaspoon ground ginger
- Pinch of salt

### Directions:

#### For batter:

- 1) Whisk together dry ingredients in a medium bowl. In a small bowl, whisk together eggs and milk.
- 2) Stir wet ingredients into dry ingredients. Let batter rest for 10-15 minutes (or you can make this hours in advance), then stir in melted, but cooled, butter.
- 3) Toast walnuts in a dry skillet over low heat until lightly browned and fragrant.

#### For Pie filling:

Add all ingredients to a small sauce pan and bring to a simmer over low heat. Stir until everything is combined. Keep on low heat until needed.

#### To make a crepe:

Add about a teaspoon of butter to a large nonstick skillet over medium heat. When the butter is melted, add about 1/2 cup of crepe batter to the pan and quickly swirl the pan so the batter spreads over the entire pan in a thin layer.

Cook crepe for about 45-60 seconds on the first side. Then use a large spatula to carefully flip the crepe.



Spread about 1/3 cup of pumpkin pie filling to the crepe and continue to cook on the second side for 90 seconds so it browns slightly.

Fold the crepe over and then over again to form a triangle.

Serve crepe immediately with walnuts and powdered sugar.

## Roasted Pumpkin Seeds

**Yield:** 2-3 cups | **Time:** 20 min.

### Ingredients:

- 2-3 cups pumpkin seeds, washed
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon paprika
- 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/8 teaspoon ground allspice

### Directions:

1) Bring a medium pot of water to a simmer with a good pinch of salt (about 1 teaspoon). Add pumpkin seeds and simmer for 10 minutes. This will help clean them and also tenderize their shells.

2) Preheat oven to 325 degrees F. Drain seeds and dry them really well. Then toss with olive oil, another pinch of salt, pepper, paprika, cinnamon, and allspice.

3) Spread seeds out on a baking sheet and bake for 10 minutes. Then remove and stir the seeds. Roast a second time for 8-10 minutes until the seeds are lightly browned.

You can eat the seeds slightly warm or let them cool and store them in an air tight container for a few weeks. Not that they will last that long.



## SHOPPING LIST

This is a full list of all the ingredients used in every meal in this week's plan. I recommend reviewing it for stuff you probably already have on hand before rushing out to the store and buying everything! If items on the list don't have amounts, it is most likely because the recipe uses a very small amount of that ingredient or it is used as a garnish. This meal plan specifically uses a lot of holiday spices so it's a great chance to check on your pantry and trade out any old ones since ground spices get stale after a year or so.

### Fresh Produce

- Avocados (2)
- Cilantro (garnish)
- Escarole (1 head)
- Poblano peppers (2)
- Pumpkins, small baking (3 for all the recipes - save the seeds!)
- SUB: You can use canned pumpkin puree for most of the recipes.
- Red onion (2)
- Romaine lettuce (1 head)
- White onion (1/2)

### Meat, Poultry, Seafood

- Skirt steak (2 lb.)

### Dairy

- Butter, unsalted (1/2 cup)
- Cream, heavy (1/2 cup)
- Eggs, large (2)
- Gruyere cheese (8 oz.)
- Milk (2 cups)
- Parmesan cheese (3/4 cup)
- Pepper jack cheese (6 oz.)
- Sour cream (garnish)

### Spices and Pantry Items

- All-purpose flour (1 cup)
- Allspice, ground (Scant teas.)
- Black pepper (2 teas.)
- Brown sugar (3 Tbsp.)
- Chili powder (3 teas.)
- Cinnamon (1 3/4 teas.)
- Cloves, ground (1/4 teas.)
- Cumin, ground (1 teas.)
- Flour tortillas (12 8-inch)
- Ginger, ground (1/4 teas.)
- Hot sauce (1 teas. + garnish)
- Kosher salt (3 Tbsp. + extra)
- Nutmeg, ground (1/2 teas.)
- Olive oil (1/4 cup + 3 Tbsp.)
- Orzo pasta (8 oz.)
- Paprika (3 teas.)
- Powdered sugar (garnish)
- Red wine vinegar (1/3 cup)
- Sourdough bread (8 slices)
- Sugar (2 Tbsp.)
- Vegetable stock (2 cups)
- 1/2 cup walnuts