

Homemade Roasted Pumpkin Puree

The recipe below calls for roasting one 4-pound sugar pumpkin, because that's what I did. But I beg you to roast 2 smaller pumpkins instead. It's very difficult to cut through the big ones, and if you get your knife stuck inside the thing you'll have to wait for your husband to come home and unjam it, which can take hours. It's also embarrassing, but less embarrassing than accidentally impaling yourself, which is what may have happened had you tried to remove the thing yourself, and slipped.

One 4-pound sugar pumpkin (*see headnote)

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Using a heavy knife, cut the pumpkin in half. Use a serrated grapefruit spoon (if you happen to have one) or a regular spoon to scrape out the seeds and all the strings. Discard. (I'm not a fan of toasted pumpkin seeds, but feel free to clean and roast them separately if you are.)

Line a rimmed baking sheet with foil and coat it with nonstick spray. Lay the pumpkin halves cut side down, and roast for 50-60 minutes or until the peel is wrinkled and the flesh is very tender. (See photo, upper right.) If you're roasting 2 smaller pumpkins, check them earlier as they won't take as long to cook.

Cool slightly, then scrape out the flesh, or, alternatively, just slip off the peel and cut the pumpkin into large chunks (See photo, lower right.) You can dice the chunks for use in stews, soups, or risottos.

To puree for baking, transfer chunks to a food processor and whirl until smooth. Stop the machine and scrape the sides a few times. It will take 2 to 3 minutes to get the pumpkin smooth.

N.B. LATE ADDITION! Set cooled puree in a cheesecloth-lined strainer over a large bowl in the refrigerator overnight -- or longer -- to drain it of excess liquid. (Fold some cheesecloth over the top and cover the whole mess with plastic wrap, too.) Store cooled puree in the refrigerator for up to 4 days, or freeze in 1 to 2 -cup quantities for future use.

Makes 5-1/2 cups puree.