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PRODUCE NOTES

October 9, 2007

Signs of Autumn: Pumpkins, Gourds and Ornamental Corn

There's a bit of an autumnal bite in the air in the mornings and late afternoons, and several of our staff members were recently spotted in our warehouse peering with childlike delight into a bin of exquisite mixed heirloom pumpkins. Autumn has arrived, and with it all manner of pumpkins, gourds, ornamental corn, popping corn, and glossy, bright red cayenne bunches, perfect for decorating your door, store, doorstep and table for the season have arrived as well.

Ask your salesperson about the mixed heirloom pumpkin bins from growers Jim and Deborah Durst at Hungry Hollow Farm in Esparto, California—these are not your standard Jack O'lantern pumpkins! Each bin contains a mixture of strange and lovely pumpkins to make you giggle and gasp; wonderfully warty deep green ones, the thick-skinned white lumina pumpkins that seem to glow on dark nights, the Musquee de Provence, which is flattened in shape and rich golden brown in color, pumpkins of pale jade green, and the stout Cinderella pumpkin, which is deep orange red in color—the classic pumpkin coach of fairytales. Several of the varieties from the mixed heirloom bin, including the white lumina pumpkins and the Cinderellas (also called "rouge vif d'Étampes") are available in boxes as well. From grower Warren Creek we have a terrific mixed mini-pumpkin box, including the tiny Jack Be Little (also called "Munchkin"), white Baby Boo, and We Be Little varieties. These adorable little pumpkins are edible! There are about one hundred twenty pieces per box.

Another exciting pumpkin we are offering is an enormous one called the Prizewinner, also grown by the Dursts at Hungry Hollow Farm. On average, these Prizewinner pumpkins weigh sixty to eighty pounds each, but can weigh up to one hundred twenty-five pounds! These pumpkins are great for "Guess the Weight" contests, for Halloween and Thanksgiving decorating, and they will inspire awe in all who see them!

Perfect for this time of year, we have decorative corn with dry husks and stunningly rich fall colors, and decorative gourds in all shapes and colors. With their fiery red color, cayenne bunches will also beautify your produce department displays and customers' homes this fall.

- Dani Yamamoto with
purchaser Aly Hein



Pop Pop Pop: Popcorn on the Cob!

Popcorn on the cob is a terrifically fun autumn treat. Popping corn comes as a smallish, dried ear of corn, often with the dry husk still attached. We have popcorn available now, but you may need to let the popcorn dry for a few weeks before popping it. The popcorn you buy now should be fully cured by November or mid-November. You can pop the corn either in the microwave oven or on top of the stove.

Microwave Method:

Remove the husk from the ear of corn (otherwise it can burn and scorch). Place the ear of dried corn into a brown paper bag and fold or roll the top of the bag. Set the microwave oven to high power, at about 2 minutes or 2 minutes, 30 seconds. Soon, you will hear your popcorn popping! There's a little bit of water inside each kernel of popcorn, and as that

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Popcorn continued

water heats, it turns to steam and this is what pops the corn. (If your microwave dish does not rotate, you may want to rotate or turn the bag midway through popping.) Listen carefully: when the rate of the popping slows, turn off the microwave. Open the bag carefully to prevent steam burns. Some of the kernels will have popped right off the cob, and some will remain attached to the cob. One ear makes a big, fluffy bag of popped corn!

Stovetop Method:

First, de-kernel the corn by sliding a spoon down the cob. (The first row is difficult to remove, but after you've de-kernelled one row, the rest of the kernels will pop right off.)

Place the kernels in a single layer at the bottom of a pot. Add enough oil to cover the kernels. Cover the pot and heat the oil. You will soon begin to hear the corn popping. Lifting the pot off the burner and shaking it gently by its handle can help ensure that most kernels get popped.

Enjoy!

Mary Rendon's Spiced Toasted Pumpkin Seeds had me making many return visits to Mary's desk last autumn, when she tried this recipe at home and brought in the seeds to share. These are delicious, and you just can't stop eating them! Much like kettle corn or salt caramels, it's that combination of sweet and salty that really gets you hooked. Cayenne pepper adds a touch of fiery heat.

- Dani Y

Spiced Toasted Pumpkin Seeds

(Makes about 1 cup)

Ingredients:

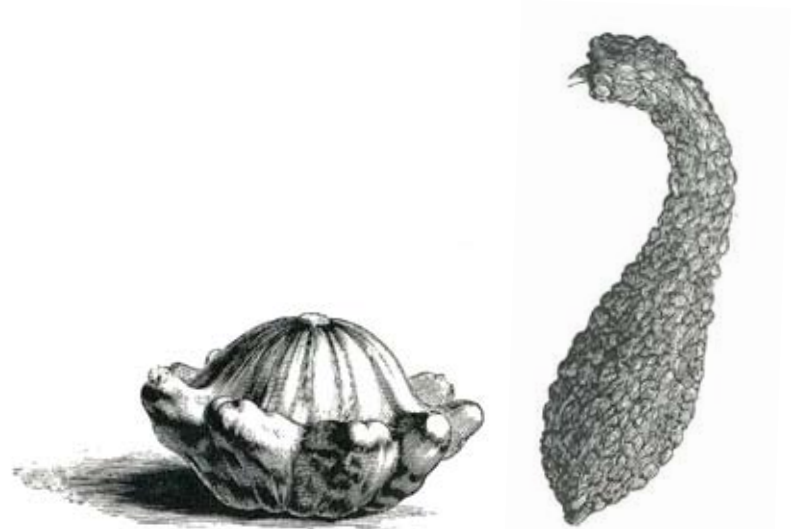
- 5 T sugar
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 1/4 tsp ground cumin
- 1/4 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp ground ginger
- 1 1/2 T peanut oil
- Cayenne pepper to taste

Procedure:

Preheat oven to 250 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Cut the pumpkin open and remove the seeds with a long-handled spoon. Separate the seeds from the flesh. Spread the seeds on the parchment paper in an even layer. Bake until dry, stirring occasionally, about one hour. Let cool.

In a bowl, combine 3 T of the sugar, the salt, cumin, cinnamon, ginger and cayenne. Set the bowl aside. Heat the oil in a large skillet over high heat. Add the pumpkin seeds and remaining 2 T sugar. Cook until sugar melts and pumpkin seeds begin to caramelize, about 45 - 60 seconds. Transfer to the bowl containing the dry spices, and stir well to coat. Let spiced seeds cool, and then enjoy! They will keep for about a week in an airtight container.

Mary Rendon, Sales



Try colorful gourds, cayenne pepper bunches, and gorgeous ornamental corn