



Pumpkin Feely Bags



It's Autumntime down on the farm, and Tractor Ted is helping to harvest pumpkins. With their big round shapes, bright orange skins and slippery insides, pumpkins are both fascinating and fun for young children to explore.

THIS ACTIVITY...

- encourages children to investigate pumpkins
- offers lots of opportunity for fine motor control and manipulation
- introduces a variety of textures to investigate
- encourages children to explore using all their senses
- offers lots of opportunity for conversation and learning new words

WHAT TO DO

Show the children images of a pumpkin harvester. Introduce a real pumpkin and look at its smooth orange skin, its prickly stalk and its curved rounded shape. Slice the top off the pumpkin and have a look inside. Give the children spoons and scoops, and let them investigate the pumpkin's insides. Show them how the top works as a lid that can be lifted on and off the pumpkin.

When the investigation has finished, retrieve the pumpkin pulp and seeds. Seal the seeds and pulp inside some sturdy ziplock freezer bags, taping round the edges of the bags with coloured parcel tape for added strength. Introduce the pumpkin feely bags to the children, and show them how they can explore the pumpkin's insides without getting their hands sticky.



THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Offer older children a variety of spoons, including wooden spoons, metal serving spoons, ladles, long-handled teaspoons and slotted spoons. Help them to try out different spoons and decide which ones work best.
- Encourage children to explore the pumpkin's many different textures, and introduce texture words – the stringy pulp, the slimy insides, the sticky juice, the smooth, hard skin, the prickly stalk.
- Many children hate getting their hands sticky. Encourage 'hands on' exploration, but let any persistently reluctant child stick to watching, sniffing and using the feely bags.
- If possible, rescue the pumpkin flesh, give it a good rinse and boil it up to make soup (see recipe box). Share Helen Cooper's classic Pumpkin Soup picture book with the children.
- Use the hollowed out pumpkin skin to make a lantern, and save the seeds for the Rainbow Pumpkin Seeds activity. Compost any parts that can't be re-used. Emphasise to the children that you are recycling the pumpkin rather than throwing it away.

Pumpkin soup recipe

Makes about ten small bowls

Ingredients

2 tablespoons olive oil
1kg pumpkin flesh, cut into chunks
1 chopped onion
700ml low salt vegetable stock
1 to 2 tablespoons of cream

What to do

Heat the oil and gently sweat the onion until soft. Add the pumpkin and continue to cook gently for about ten minutes. Add the stock, bring to the boil, turn down the heat and simmer for another ten minutes until the pumpkin is soft. Blend the soup, stir in the cream and serve.

Pumpkin play

(some more ideas)

- Hammer golf tees into a pumpkin. If the skin is tough, punch holes to get the children started with their hammering.
- Make Hallowe'en pumpkin plates. Paint paper plates orange and stick on black card shapes to make faces.



- Use the pumpkin as a canvas. Pour brightly coloured paint over the pumpkin, and draw on it with child-safe marker pens.

