

# Novelty Isn't Squashed In Pumpkin Fields

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LEOLA (Lancaster Co.) —

It used to be that the mention of the words pumpkin, squash or gourd conjured up a distinctive image of the item. Pumpkins were bright orange jack-o-lanterns, squash were tan butternuts, and gourds were miniature duplicates of pumpkins and squash.

But today an onslaught of pumpkin, squash, gourds, and ornamentals in all sizes, shapes, colors, and varieties can be found at roadside stands and produce auctions.

Pumpkins vary from brilliant orange miniatures to milky orange shades that reach weights of 600 pounds.

Squash may be found in black, blue, green, white, yellow, and orange shades. They vary from smooth oblong shapes to rough rugged Blue Hubbards.

Ornamental gourds come in multicolored and solids in smooth and warty textures and in delightful shapes such as Turk's Turban, Crown of Thorns, snakes and alligators.

"Novelty is in. People get tired of the same old thing. In the vegetable field, anything that looks different has appeal," said Tom Elkner, horticultural agent for Lancaster County.

How can you tell the difference between miniature squash and a gourd? Take a Jersey Golden Acorn, which is a bright golden squash that may be eaten when it is no larger than a golf ball. How do you know that bright orange,

smooth skinned pumpkin isn't a delightful ornamental grown strictly for a touch of color in fall arrangements?

"That's a hard question," said Elkner. "Squash and gourds are from the same family. Generally gourds are really hard shelled. If you cut open a gourd, it is thin fleshed. A squash has softer, thicker flesh and the skin is generally softer."

Gourds or ornamentals are hard-rinded inedible fruits or plants that are cultivated for beauty rather than food usage.

While gourds are often arranged in their natural beauty, some craftspersons capitalize on unusual shapes and add artistic touches. Gooseneck gourds are adorned with hats, eyes, ribbons and aprons. Crown of Thorns are rounded gourds with unique thorn-like protuberances. The white variety is often painted to look like miniature ghosts. Large bottled gourds make unique birdhouses with an opening inserted and hung from a tree.

Although one can technically eat pumpkins grown for jack-o-lanterns, a seasoned cook will tell you to never use them for baking pies. Squash are considered the favorites but the varieties that make the best pies are a hotly contested issue.

"Definitely neck pumpkins," said the mother of John Meck who grows several varieties to sell on his Willow Street farm.

Many people agree with her. But just as many prefer acorn or



Elaine and Jeanette Nolt play with gourds and pumpkins to which their mother added an artistic touch to portray the shapes they are named after shapes such as alligator, goose, and snake.



Wagonloads of pumpkins reflect the richness of the season.



John Meck of Willow Street unloads pumpkins and squash at the Leola Produce Auction.

butternut varieties.

The odd-shaped Blue Hubbard squash is fast becoming a popular choice for pumpkin pie usage in this area. The blue-gray rough and rugged looking squash covers deep

yellow flesh with good flavor and texture.

It's the recommendation from Nolt's Roadside Stand in Talmage.

"I've never actually baked pies from all the different types at the same time and compared them because I'm so busy taking care of this," said Mrs. Nolt as she pointed to the hundreds of pumpkins arranged inside the barn and outside on farm wagons and children's wagons. "Lately, I've used the Hubbard variety and it makes really good-tasting pies."

Fay Strickler, extension home economist who writes the column "Consuming Thoughts" for this

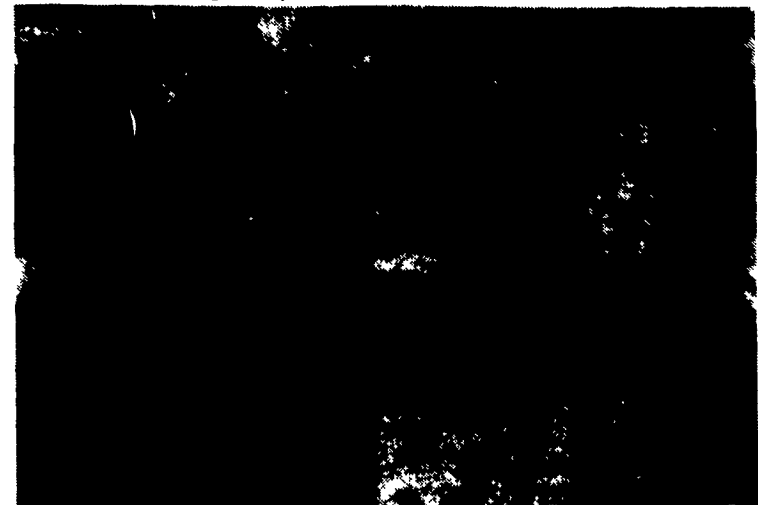
(Turn to Page B15)



Turk's Turban and other varieties.



Elaine Nolt finds pumpkins arranged in the barn a neat place to play. The Nolts sell hundreds of pumpkins in all different sizes and shapes at their farm located along Rt. 772 in Talmage.



A mixture of ornamentals allow customers to select varieties in shades and shapes they prefer.