

Celebrations of Autumn's Bounty



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Decorating for fall in Florida presents the opportunity to express the season's colors in our own unique way, one that showcases the extraordinary beauty of the Sunshine State. By collecting golden-tinged seashells from our sandy shores, deep brown pine cones found along our trails and other richly hued treasures gathered from the outdoors, we can create a cornucopia that celebrates the natural abundance of autumn that surrounds us, right here on the Gulf Coast. Grown locally by many of our farmers, the pumpkin, one of the iconic gourds so identified with the harvest season, is the perfect fall accent, adding a festively bright jolt of orange.

IF you prefer the short-and-sweet approach to selecting a pumpkin, the Venice area offers plenty of convenient options to consider. Grocery stores tend to have large bins full of various sized pumpkins and other holiday items during this season. Farmers' market vendors often bring in big bushels full of locally grown gourds, which they may artistically arrange on hay bales for a more festive display, and many churches sponsor pumpkin patches.

By visiting the pumpkin patch at a fall festival, however, you can make a fun day out of this activity, spend some time outdoors with family and friends, and make wonderful memories together. Capturing the spirit of this season, these events also offer the chance to experience a number of our favorite harvest-time traditions, all in one convenient location.

Pick-your-own pumpkin patches, which are popular seasonal attractions in regions such as the Midwest or New

England area, are less frequently found in the Sunshine State. In Southwest Florida and throughout the country, the most common type of pumpkin patch features scores of the golden gourds of all shapes, sizes and colors that have been harvested from fields nearby or brought in especially for the occasion. At these attractions, a festive autumn setting is created by lining up the signature squash of the season along walkways, displaying them atop tables, or having them sorted into bins with similarly sized or shaped gourds. Adding to the rustic charm of the atmosphere, pumpkins are often artistically arranged on hay bales or in wagons, creating the ideal spot for capturing photos of that special moment when a child discovers the perfect pumpkin. As such, they are a wonderful place to watch your children or grandkids fully explore each row in wide-eyed excitement and witness as the younger ones try to pick up pumpkins that are twice their size!

IN the Venice and surrounding areas, these festivals seem to have been designed with the family in mind. While young children will delight in taking a special pony ride and seeing all the animals in the petting zoo, the entire family will enjoy being able to go together on a hayride. Enhancing the playful atmosphere, some of the festivals have bounce houses, huge inflatable slides and, for the more adventurous, even climbing walls. Since many of these events feature fun, kid-friendly costume contests, it's not unusual to catch sight of a bevy of petite princesses, fairies and mermaids, swashbuckling young pirates and cowboys, and even sweet little infants dressed as peas-in-the-pod,

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WHEN YOU SET OUT TO SELECT YOUR PUMPKIN, KEEP THESE TIPS IN MIND TO HELP YOU MAKE THE BEST PURCHASE:

- Look for a pumpkin that feels firm and heavy for its size.
- Check it for freshness by turning it over and placing pressure on the bottom with your thumbs. If it flexes or gives, the pumpkin is not fresh.
- Search for one that has retained a consistent coloring throughout.
- Carefully inspect it for mold, open cuts, soft spots, or wrinkles, all of which indicate damage or early spoilage.
- Choose one with a solidly attached stem, preferably one that is green because the greener the stem, the more freshly harvested the pumpkin.
- If you plan to carve your pumpkin, place it on a flat surface to see if it remains level.

