



Step 1: To make a lid, draw a circle or a hexagon at least 5 inches in diameter around the pumpkin's stem. Cut out the lid at an angle (so that the outside edge is larger than the inside) to keep it from slipping inside. For a carving tool, we recommend a pumpkin saw. Those using knives should carve gently and steadily. (Tip: Don't slide the knife all the way out of the pumpkin.)

Step 2: When the lid is free, scrape it clean of seeds and pulp with a large metal spoon or an ice-cream scoop. Instead of removing the top, you may choose to remove a section from the bottom or side of the pumpkin. (This works well for an unstable or small pumpkin, or for certain designs.)

Step 3: Scrape until you've had enough or until the wall is 1 to 1 1/2 inches thick (stop before you compromise the strength of the walls).

Step 4: At the base, flatten a spot for the candle (again, don't make it too thin, or the bottom will rot).

Step 5: There are two ways to transfer your design onto the pumpkin. One is to copy it freehand onto a clean, dry pumpkin with a water-based marker (mistakes can be easily corrected with a paper towel). The other is to tape your pattern or template to the pumpkin, then score the design into the skin by poking holes through the pattern with a nail or plastic poking tool (available in some pumpkin-carving kits).

Step 6: The black portion of the image is the part of the pumpkin that you'll be cutting out and removing. Carve by starting at the center of your design and working outward (this avoids putting pressure on areas already carved). Begin with the innermost and smallest features -- eyes before eyebrows, for instance -- and try to carve the inside lines of each feature before the outside lines. Be gentle: If you're using a knife, run it over each line a few times, rather than pushing all the way through. Don't cut all the way to the end of a line on the first cut. As each shape loosens up, gently push it out of the pumpkin with a finger or a dull pencil point (a good job for small kids). Larger shapes, such as gap-toothed grins, may have to be removed in pieces.

Tip: If you cut something you didn't intend to, perform an ad hoc pumpkin surgery: Stick a toothpick through the flesh side of the piece and fit it back into place.

Step 7: You can create dramatic effects by letting candlelight through the pumpkin in varying intensity. For a shaded effect, don't cut all the way through the pumpkin. Instead, make a shallow, angled (or V-shaped) cut (1/8 to 1/2 inch, depending on the thickness of the pumpkin wall), then peel away the outer flesh with a knife tip, spoon or vegetable peeler. You also can use deep, angled cuts to remove larger pieces, so that the light reflects off the walls of the hole.

Step 8: Place a candle inside your pumpkin (votives are more stable than tapers). Light the candle, put on the lid and turn out the lights. If the candle doesn't stay lit, increase the air supply either by enlarging some of the features or by carving a vent on the back of the lid.

Lastly, put your jack-o'-lantern in a place of honor (away from flammables) and remember to blow out all candles before you go to sleep.