



Westchester 2024 Pumpkin Smash

As Halloween approaches, so too does Westchester's 6th annual Pumpkin Smash brought to you by the Green Residents of Westchester (GROW). The Pumpkin Smash is an annual effort by communities to divert pumpkins from landfills by providing locations for residents to drop off jack-o-lanterns (*minus candles*) and other gourds to be composted. It is held each year on the Saturday after Halloween and this year that will be on November 2nd.

Many people are surprised to find out that Illinois produces three and a half times the amount of pumpkins as the second most productive states, Indiana and California (Source: USDA). So why bother to compost them instead of just throwing them in the trash?

Pumpkins are nutritionally valuable since they contain significant amounts of fiber, potassium, and protein. Pumpkins are also 90% water and thus when disposed of in a landfill these nutrients and water are lost from the environment rather than being recycled or reinvested back into the environment. The decomposition of organic matter, such as pumpkins, produces greenhouse gasses. Landfills are the 3rd largest

producers of greenhouse gasses so by composting them we can significantly reduce those emissions.

Composting any organic matter is also just plain beneficial. Compost reduces, and in some cases, eliminates the need for chemical fertilizers. It is a nutrient-dense soil amendment that can provide cost savings over conventional soil remediation. Lastly, compost enhances water retention in soils helping to reduce flooding in our yards and streets.

In 2023, Westchester joined with 95 other communities to divert pumpkins from making it into landfills. The event resulted in the composting of 482,000 pounds of pumpkins. This equates to a reduction of 173 tons of CO₂ from entering the atmosphere and the diverting of nearly 52,000 gallons from entering landfills.

This year we will have **two locations!** *(Be sure to remove candles, stickers, pipe cleaners, and any non-compostable decorations before smashing your pumpkin.)*

1. Behind the Westchester Community Church: 1840 Westchester Boulevard
2. In the back of the Mayfair Recreation Center parking lot: 10835 Wakefield Street

If you have any questions, please email Commissioner Kari Roberg at kroberg@westchester-il.gov. The GROW commission generally meets on the first Thursday of each month at 6:30 pm. Join us in striving for a green Village!



Leave the Leaves for a Healthier Yard and Planet

Fallen leaves provide essential habitat for wildlife, add organic matter to soil, help to prevent weeds, and reduce carbon emissions from transportation. By leaving leaves on the ground, you create a healthier lawn while supporting biodiversity in your backyard.

Tips for Managing Leaves

- Use a mulching mower to shred leaves directly on your lawn, leaving a thin layer of leaf debris.
- Rake excess leaves into garden beds or around trees and shrubs as a natural mulch.
- Add leaves to your compost pile to create a rich soil amendment for your garden.

Preventing Itch Mite Bites

While you're managing your leaves, it's important to take precautions against itch mites, tiny pests that have proliferated in the wake of periodical cicadas. Here are some tips to help you stay bite-free:

- Wear long sleeves, pants, gloves, and a hat when working outside. Tucking pants into socks can prevent mites from getting to your skin.
- When handling leaves, avoid shaking them, as this can release mites into the air and onto your skin.
- After spending time outdoors, put your clothes in the laundry and take a soapy shower immediately to wash away any mites that may have landed on your skin or clothing.

GROW'S Recipe of the Month

It's pumpkin season! Whether making your own pumpkin puree or using canned, try these Pumpkin Chocolate Chip Oatmeal Bars for a dairy-free fall treat. Did you know dairy production contributes considerably to climate change, with carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide emissions (worldwildlife.org)? Your diet choices can make positive impacts to your health, and the environment! Have a plant-based recipe you'd like to share with the community? Send it to GROW@westchester-il.gov for consideration for future newsletters.

Pumpkin Chocolate Chip Oatmeal Bars

prep time: 10 mins. | cook time: 25 mins. | total time: 2 hours (includes cooling)

makes 16 bars

Ingredients

3 cups (255g) old-fashioned **whole rolled oats** or **quick oats** (*not instant*)

1 teaspoon **baking powder**

1 teaspoon store-bought or homemade **pumpkin pie spice**

1 teaspoon **ground cinnamon**

1/2 teaspoon **salt**

1 cup (225g) fresh or canned **pumpkin puree**

1/3 cup (56g) **unsweetened applesauce**

1/3 cup (70g) **coconut oil**, melted

1/3 cup (80ml) **pure maple syrup**

1/4 cup (45g) **coconut sugar** (*or packed light or dark brown sugar*)

1 teaspoon **pure vanilla extract**

3/4 cup (135g) **semi-sweet chocolate chips**, plus a few to press into the top (*use dairy-free to make it vegan*)

Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F (177°C). Line the bottom and sides of an 8-inch or 9-inch square baking pan with parchment paper, leaving an overhang on the sides to lift the bars out (makes cutting easier!). Set aside.
2. Pulse the oats in a food processor or blender until they're slightly broken up. (For whole oats, about 10 pulses. For quick oats, about 5-6 pulses.) Pour into a large bowl and add the remaining ingredients. With a rubber spatula or large spoon, stir together until combined. Mixture/dough will be **very** heavy and thick.
3. Spoon mixture into prepared pan. Using the back of a flat spatula or a spoon, spread and press it tightly down into the pan. Make sure it's flat and very compact, which helps guarantee the bars hold their shape. Dot a few chocolate chips into the top—this is optional and only for looks! I usually use about 1-2 Tablespoons on top.
4. Bake for 25-28 minutes or until the edges are very lightly browned and the center appears set. Avoid over-baking, which dries the bars out.
5. Remove from the oven and cool in the pan at room temperature for 30-60 minutes. After that, place the pan in the refrigerator for 1-2 hours until chilled.
6. Remove bars from the pan using the overhang on the sides then cut into squares.
7. Cover leftover bars tightly and store at room temperature for up to 3 days or in the refrigerator for up to 10 days.

Credit: SallysBakingAddiction.com