

Cucurbitology with Anne Copeland

Ologies Podcast

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Oh heey, it's your friend who's at the mall, and texts you photos of jeans that cannot possibly be the new thing, please tell me high-waisted with no pockets isn't a thing, please, Alie Ward, back with another episode of *Ologies*, we're just leaning into the season. Crunchy leaves, wood smoke, scarves, glowy little lights in the darkness. This episode – pumpkins! If pumpkins were a person, I'd be down to be their roommate. They seem chill, they seem friendly, they seem down for a good time, like they would come in clutch with a pep talk when you need it. Pumpkins seem like totally not assholes.

But before we get into it, let me thank all the folks at [Patreon.com/Ologies](https://patreon.com/Ologies) for supporting the podcast. Thanks to everyone wearing *Ologies* merch from OlogiesMerch.com. Thanks to all the folks who of course are just destroying that subscribe button, and rating the show, and keeping it up in the charts. And of course you brave souls who submit a review, because you know I care, and I pick out a new one each week, such as, for example, [Alchemist19872013](#) says:

Dad Ward is like your long-lost best friend from kindergarten. You know, the one you would sneak off to the playground with and turn over rocks by the pond. I have rebelled against the podcast culture since its very inception, but it's just not possible to not enjoy this podcast.

Alchemist, thank you so much, let's get into it. Let's turn over the rock that is Cucurbitology. Okay, what in the David S. Pumpkins is this word? [*“David Pumpkins? I mean, are we supposed to know who that is?”*] I know you have questions. Okay, I looked it up. Cucurbitology comes from the Latin for ‘gourd’ and yes, cucurbitology looks like ‘cucumbers’ because they're related! We're going to get into that later. But also, I'd like to note that the word ‘pumpkin’ comes from the French for ‘pom-pom’, which came in a winding, viney way from the Greek *pepōn*, which means ‘to be cooked by the sun’. Genus and species of most pumpkins: *Cucurbita pepo*. A gourd that's been cooked in the sun.

I was looking for a pumpkin expert, or someone who studies pumpkins, or a pumpkin scholar, but not just the science of pumpkins, but also the emotions, and the folklore, and the history, and I came across a book entitled [*drumroll*] *Pumpkin Pumpkin: Folklore, History, Planting Hints, and Good Eating*, by someone who loves pumpkins so much she studied them intensely and wrote a whole book about them. So, I tippy-tapped around on the internet, I found this ologist's info. I cold-called her. I just left a voicemail at 6 p.m. on a Sunday, like a freak. I was driving on my way back through the Mojave Desert. She called me back like an hour later, and I happened to be driving through her tiny town of Yucaipa, so I pulled over, I chatted with her for about 15 minutes, before I had the nerve to say, “Hey, I know I'm a stranger, and it's like 8 p.m. on a Sunday night, but can I come over? Can I talk to you about pumpkins?” She said she was a night owl anyway, she gave me the address, I headed over.

[*pre-interview, outside:*]

Alie: *I'm approaching the porch... here we go! Hello? Anne??*

How could I be so lucky?! She was proceeded by a few chihuahuas and came out in comfy Sunday clothes, her blond hair pulled back in a ponytail.

Anne: *Great to meet you!*

Alie: *Thanks for letting me come over!*

Anne: *Lovely, you are a lovely lady!*

Alie: *Oh, so are you! Thanks for letting me come over! I was like, "I'm kind of really close to you, is that okay?"*

Anne: *Oh, that's okay, we're really freeform around here.*

Alie: *Oh, great!*

Anne: *I'm an old-time hippie. [to the dogs] Now, get down, mommy's doing an interview, okay?*

So, if you hear any little pup-whimpers, or the soft gurgling of a nearby fish tank, just consider it part of the immersive pumpkin experience, which was lovely. We chatted about: What is a pumpkin? How long have we been carving them up? And cooking them down? How many varieties are there? What else are they used for? How do you pick out a good one? What are the biggest myths, and the biggest pumpkins? How memories can follow you for decades, and the fascinating history that led this pumpkin studier to embark on her research. So, light a little candle, enjoy the flickering and cozy wisdom of Cucurbitologist, Anne Copeland.

[now sitting inside]

Anne: I'm a senior. I'm going to be 78, November 22nd, which falls on Thanksgiving every so many years, and that's one of the ways I come to love pumpkins.

Alie: You must have had a pumpkin pie for your birthday every year.

Anne: Oh, I always had pumpkin pie, pumpkin cake, pumpkin soup, pumpkin you-name-it.

Alie: And did you get sick of having a pumpkin pie for your birthday?

Anne: Oh, no, no, no, no, no. Never, never, never. No. It was encouraging to me because I sort of adopted pumpkins as my own thing. So no, I never got tired of pumpkins.

Alie: Were you always really curious, did you grow up curious as a kid?

Anne: Yeah. Oh, yeah. *[Alie giggling]* I used to lie in the grass, and look through the grass, and look at insects, and try to imagine what their lives would be like, living down there and, you know, what their world was like.

Aside: When we chatted on the phone, Anne described herself as, "An unconventional senior, woohoo!" and when a person uses, "Woohoo!" as a form of punctuation, you have to make a U-turn, and you have to beg to come over to meet this person and hear about their life, and how pumpkins fit into the past and the present.

Alie: Kind of a hippie.

Anne: I'm very much a hippie, never into the drug scene and all that, but I love the music, I love the art, I love creativity, I love people speaking up about things they believe in.

Alie: Tell me a little bit about your background, what did you study?

Anne: I started out in nursing. When I finally got to go to college, I think I was close to 30, and I started out in nursing, and I went through that about two years, and after two years, I said, "Gee, I wonder when we're ever going to get to go to a hospital, this is a four-year program. I sort of need to get a sense of what it's like to be a nurse."

So I said, "What could I be?" My husband at the time said, "You know, I'm going to take you to this place in Los Angeles, it's called the Johnson O'Connor Research Foundation." These people test you based on your innate abilities. Not on questions that they ask you. They did this long testing process for days and days, and then they came up with this idea that... he said, "You are perfect for archeology." I said, "Archeology?? You know, that does sound really interesting." So, I got a degree in archeology. And I actually worked in the field, I went out into Arizona, New Mexico, and also I went down into Mexico.

Aside: As an archeologist, Anne was researching the pottery of indigenous people of the Southwest and Mexico, looking at some Pre-Columbian methods of firing pottery and cooking. She said she loved the work.

Anne: I loved the study, it was kind of perfect for me. Unfortunately, archeologists have this thing that's known as the archeological diseases. I got para-typhoid, and then I got valley fever. By then, I said, "You know, I may not make it many more years if I don't switch fields."

Aside: Anne also worked as a graphic artist doing typesetting, and she started a small non-profit for people dealing with physical and developmental challenges. She said she was deeply affected by her brother's experience in Vietnam, after he returned with a brain injury and PTSD. This woman's heart is a *Cucurbita maxima*, which is a species of giant pumpkin, which we'll talk about later.

Anne: I love people, I love relating to other people of all kinds, and helping them in different ways. I taught illiterate adults, I did a lot of things in my life. So then, how did I come to write this book?

Aside: Solid question. Anne's husband at the time was an anthropologist who was super encouraging.

Anne: He said, "You know, you're good at writing, you like to write, why don't you write a book?" He said, "Why don't you write a book about - I don't know - pumpkins!" We had been to Virginia when we first got together, and I had never been there before. It was raining, it was in the fall, it was muddy everywhere, and we were driving through the hills. I just suddenly said, "Pumpkins! We're coming to pumpkins!" And said, "No, don't be silly, there's no -" and he didn't even finish his sentence. We come over the top of the hill, and there on the right side down at the bottom of the hill, and right in the mud puddle, in the biggest mud puddle, is this pumpkin stand! So, I had to go and get my pumpkin right then. I had to, you know... you don't just go get a pumpkin. You have to evaluate it. You have to make sure it has the qualities, and the qualities change every year. Because they're magical! They don't just stay the same.

I went and picked this really, really big pumpkin, because I decided I had to have a big, big pumpkin. Now, mind you, we had to fly back from Virginia to California, and I wouldn't let go of my pumpkin. I took it on the plane with me. It was so cute, because normally, you know, people are kind of like, they're looking at you, "Oh gee, what are they up to? They could be a terrorist? Who knows." But even the pilot, everybody was smiling, and they were like, "Oh yeah, take it in!" That kind of started it.

Aside: Anne had a few friends who were gourmet chefs, with this huge library of vintage books, and she would leaf through them, just mesmerized.

Anne: They had this remarkable collection of old, old, old cookbooks. I mean from the 1800s. In fact, every recipe was cooked on a wood-burning stove in an iron pot, and there were no

measurements. So, Louisa and I had fun trying to figure out, “How much do you think?” “Oh, I don’t know, what do you think?” And like I said, I’m unconventional in the sense that number one, I don’t make a recipe twice the same way. And number two, I question things that are called for to put in, and I address this in my book because I don’t want anybody to go, “She forgot to tell me to put in a quarter-teaspoon of salt! And my cooking is ruined!”

I told people, you know what, salt is a very personal issue. I did a little bit on the history of salt, and I said, “Salt is your choice, but it’s not an essential.” You’re not going to ruin your recipe if you don’t put salt in it at all. [*That’s my business.*] Why should I tell you a quarter teaspoon, when maybe you want to put a whole teaspoon, or even a tablespoon? It’s up to you. You want to kill yourself early? Have at it! [*Alie laughing delightedly*] Have fun!

So, Louisa and I would try out all these recipes. We made pumpkin soap and it was one of our funniest experiences, because neither of us had made soap before. They’re calling for mutton fat, and things like that that we didn’t really have. We had to figure out, “Well what would be like mutton fat? Could we go get the donkey down the street? Or how about a goose? What should we use?” We just kept experimenting, and it took us a long time to get it to where we actually were able to make it, but we did do it. That was a heap of fun.

Alie: Getting back to how to pick a pumpkin. How do you pick a pumpkin? What are we looking for?

Anne: It’s going to be different every single time you go. The color’s going to be different, the shape of the pumpkin is going to be different, the size of it, whether it has a stem at the top that’s long, or whether it doesn’t even have a stem. It’s going to change every year according to what your... I mean, it’s magic! Every year you’ll know it when you see it. It may take a long time to figure it out, but that’s half the fun of getting one.

Aside: For a decorative pumpkin, use intuition, you can summon your Spidey-sense, tap into some witch’s magic, and just get magnetized to the right one. Now, if you’re going to eat it, the darker the green stem and the orange skin mean it’s ready to be picked, ready to be purchased, and you can hold it up to your ear and thump it. The louder that hollow, echoey sound, the better the pumpkin.

And side note, if you ever need to lovingly threaten someone, say, for Venmo-ing you for enchiladas when you said they were your treat, or not texting you the second they get home safe, you can always say that you’ll thump them on the pumpkin. That’s been a Ward family threat for years. It translates to, “I love you. How dare you?”

Alie: What about some varieties of pumpkins?

Anne: Oh, there are a lot, a lot, a lot of pumpkin varieties. Now, a pumpkin is not a typical fruit. It’s also not a vegetable.

Alie: Oh, it’s not a vegetable?

Anne: No, it’s not a vegetable.

Alie: It’s a fruit?

Anne: No... well, sort of. A pumpkin, believe it or not, is a berry.

Alie: Ohhh, what?!

Anne: It’s a berry!

Alie: How, why?

Anne: It's a berry! [*laughs*] Because it said, "I'm going to be a berry." And it's 'berry' true.

Aside: It's a frikken' *berry*, y'all! It's a frikken' *berry*. And I looked it up. And so are cucumbers. And avocados are a berry. Bananas are a berry. Eggplants are a *berry*. These are berries! They are fleshy, seeded fruits that are formed from a single flower containing one ovary. Boom. Berries.

Anne says that the biggest flimflam she's here to debunk is that pumpkins are not a vegetable. In her book, she calls the pumpkin "a botanical platypus." But refer to them as a vegetable, and she might thump you on the berry.

Anne: So yeah, you have a lot of fun with pumpkins because there's a lot of really different things about pumpkins. They come in different sizes, shapes, they were grown in Mexico waaaayyy, way back, even before the Incas and so forth. They were grown in China way, way back. I don't know the Chinese name, sorry for those of you who speak fluent Chinese. I'm sorry. [*Alie giggling*] I don't mean to disappoint you!

Alie: What are some of your favorite varieties of pumpkin?

Anne: I like... there's a pumpkin that is green, it has stripes, and sometimes it has red and green.

Alie: What?!

Anne: They're very small. They're called kabocha.

Aside: Okay, these little pumpkins are Japanese, and if you google image search kabocha in Japan, you will find all manner of pumpkins. But to English speakers, kabocha means a short, squat squash that you've probably had in tempura. And you either save it as the last piece you eat, as a treat, or you eat it first, because life is short, and someone at the table might say, "Oooh, can I have some of your tempura?" and you want the pumpkin one for yourself. You gotta eat it fast.

PS, Australians call all kinds of squash pumpkin. It's *calabaza* in Spanish, and candied in Mexico for Day of the Dead festivities, and the British used to call them pompions. Now, the smooth doorstep pumpkins we're used to in America are Connecticut Field Pumpkins. The smaller ones that we make into pies are Sweet Sugar Pies. And there Jarrahdale blue pumpkins, Casper white pumpkins, the bumpy ones are called peanut. There's Long Island cheese pumpkins, because they look like a cheese wheel. There are others called white ghost, warty goblins, and baby boo. Essentially just come up with a new pumpkin, and give it your cat's weirdest nickname, you're good to go! But how do you make a new pumpkin?

Anne: If you want to cross-pollinate pumpkins, you can't just put the seeds together and expect them to grow right. You have to literally hand-pollinate them, you have to pretend to be a bee. [*"I'm a bumble bee!"*] Go out there and buzz around, and take your little Q-tip and hand-pollinate them. Sometimes they will grow for you, and sometimes they won't. It depends on the level of the type of pumpkin that it is.

Back in the day, when I started working on the pumpkin cookbook, it was pretty incredible because I'd go to the grocery store, they would have gotten the Halloween pumpkins out, but they'd have a lot of pumpkins left still, and I'd tell them I was writing a book, and they'd give me a whole... I mean, I had people give me a whole basket full, a whole grocery basket full of pumpkins for free because they wanted to get rid of them anyway, and they said, "Oh wow, good, here take them."

During pioneer days, they didn't always have flour available, and they also didn't always have food for the cattle, so those were used, particularly back East, to feed the cattle, and also to get flour. So, they would slice the pumpkins and get the seeds out of them, and then they would hang them up on the ceilings to dry, and then they would grind them up into flour. They actually made pumpkin flour.

Alie: I didn't know that! Tell me a little bit more about the history of pumpkins. So, South America, the Incas, and then at what point did they start growing them in North America, in Europe? I mean they're pretty much grown on every continent, I would imagine.

Anne: Right. Well, they figured that the American Indians were growing them for a while. They just may not have looked like the pumpkins we have today. They might have looked more like a squash, for example. They might have been smaller.

They believed that the seeds were very healthy for you, which they are. So, they believed that they would take away parasites and things like that. So, they would eat the seeds; dry them, and eat them.

Aside: Okay, side note. How ancient are pumpkins? Did they come from aliens? Probably not. Scientists have found seeds that are over 7,000 years old. They think they originated in Central America, as smaller, more bitter little gourds. Indigenous populations all over the continent have for centuries used pumpkins in stews, dried them, used them in medicine. Squash blossoms - which also, side note, amazing fried, thank you very much - those were used for skin injuries. And from 1836 to the mid-1900s, pumpkin seeds were recognized as a remedy for intestinal infections.

And more recent research has been on L-tryptophan in pepita seeds helping with symptoms of depression, which part of that is probably just sitting there cracking 'em with your teeth. It's so ding-dang fun.

Also, according to Kaiser Permanente's website, there have been pumpkin seed medical trials showing promise in reducing kidney stone risk and helping with a parasite that comes from snails. So, your glowing porch orb contains a little botanical wizardry.

Alie: You mentioned earlier that pumpkins are magical.

Anne: Oh, absolutely.

Alie: Talk to me a little bit about how you feel about pumpkins.

Anne: I mean, it's not just the pumpkin itself, it's the whole season that it ushers in. It's all the good things that we know and love. Getting together with friends, changing our personality via a costume.

Aside: Halloween, quick reminder, is the Eve of All Hallows Day to honor saints. And the tradition of dressing up comes in part to embody the costume that you're wearing, and partly to scare off the demons that are all around, just chilling, waiting to cross the boundary into death the next day. It's kind of like right before some holy day, we need to just wild out and get stupid. Like Mardi Gras before Lent. You got New Year's Eve before all of our January 1st resolutions take effect. And then, there's always those soggy-eyed squads of pre-wedding bachelor and bachelorettes just vadin' through Las Vegas casinos, weeks before a wedding.

Now, some researchers have found a link between higher caloric intake in the colder months, attributing it to old hard-wiring for storing up on fat before a fast. So, Halloween is

a time to dress up like someone who can kick more ass than you can in order to ward off evil, and also to eat all the candy you can, because death looms close, and the fruit trees will be bare in the winter. It makes sense!

Anne: There were all these, kind of, magical things when I was growing up. We did bobbing for apples, we did popcorn balls. Today they just go out and buy a bag of candy, throw it in a bowl, and give it to the kids. But it wasn't like that then. There was a lot more to the activity itself. So to me, pumpkins became magical. When something changes your memories in life and makes it something you'll always remember. Here I am, almost 78, and I remember every single minute of that. So yeah, that was a good time.

Alie: What was it like for you to research your book? When you really decided, I'm going to write a book about pumpkins.

Anne: Yeah, I love researching! It just fulfilled my need to do something that I love to do.

Alie: When you were researching for the book, how did you structure it? I know that you go over some recipes, and you go over history and folklore. What was your favorite part of researching?

Anne: Actually, it was the history and the folklore to start out with. The recipes came along later, but I actually started looking into the history and the folklore first. And then I kind of got into growing hints, and then I kind of got into the cooking part of it.

Aside: Anne says that after she wrote the first edition of *Pumpkin, Pumpkin* in 1986, she had to send off query letters to publishers, that's how you did it in those days. Hoping that one would write back and request the manuscript. Someone suggested that she keep a chart of the publishing house's responses, and if she got rejected, just keep a record of why.

Before her book finally made it to print, now in its third edition, she was rejected 600 times. And somehow, she's still sunny about it.

Anne: What a great learning experience that was! Because of all those 600, not one of them was because of my writing, or my style, they all liked it. In those days there weren't a lot of specialized cookbooks, that was one issue, and the other issue was that they considered it seasonal, which of course we all know it's not. You can buy pumpkins all year round in one form or another, and people do. It was a good learning experience.

I always tell anybody who's writing a book today, don't get discouraged. Number one, in all likelihood it's not your writing. It's either the wrong kind of book, or it's a book that even though you may have written it well, there's something about it that did not sell. It's that you've picked the wrong title, or you've picked the wrong art, or there's some aspect of it that doesn't draw people. You've got to have the right ingredients. It took me three editions to get this really good cover that looks good, to take all the art out of the book, and get down to basics.

It's been through good revisions, and I'm glad I had this ability to go through this process, really like going to college. And free! Free!

Alie: What is some of the folklore surrounding pumpkins? Because I'm thinking of people stepping into pumpkins as carriages, we've got Ichabod Crane out there, we got all kinds of stuff.

Anne: Yep! Oh, there are myths that involve pumpkins from other lands, where they actually believe that humanity came from a pumpkin.

Aside: PS, I did look this up, and a 2001 article from the journal *Economic Botany* catalogs several creation myths from different Asian cultures. Most of which involve people surviving a great flood by floating in a hollow pumpkin. Or the birthing of a pumpkin – yeeeouch! – that’s cut into many pieces to form people. Can you imagine, going through labor and they’re like, “PS, your baby is huge. It’s a pumpkin. Also, we’re going to dice it up, so you now have like, a thousand babies.” No! Hard pass.

But historians think that the pumpkin plant didn’t even make it to Asia until Post-Columbian times, but this folklore has been passed down through enough oral and written tradition that it stuck. And here in America, there are old stories from southern communities and African American communities about riding pumpkin vines into new lands, since they grow so fast. Just like, hop a pumpkin vine, like a bullet train.

And also stories about convincing Europeans that pumpkins are donkey eggs, and Anne includes some of these southern United States folklore tales verbatim in her book, and says they’re of special interest to her because the historical stories are in African American vernacular English, and you can see the Intonational Phonology episode, with the phenomenal Dr. Nicole Holliday for more on that. And Anne’s husband is part African American, and so those stories have ties to his family history. So, she loves the folklore, which is... folklore is such a hard word to say three times. Folklore. Can you say – I’ve messed this up so many times. Anyway. Folklore.

Anne: There’s a lot of variety in the folklore, and it depends where it comes from.

Alie: What are some of your favorite stories?

Anne: I like the one, there’s one about a Chinese princess, and the Emperor wants to marry her, but she is in love with another man. She agrees to marry him, but she wants to go inside this pumpkin for a while. She jumps basically off a cliff into the river, pushes the pumpkin and gets off. That’s one of the ones I like because it’s kind of strange. It’s really different from what you expect.

Aside: This one is about a family who has a pumpkin in their yard, and they decide to cut it in half and surprise! There’s a human baby inside. And they’re like, “Cool, free baby.” And the baby grows up to be smokin’ hot. The Emperor is like, “You’re my hot wife now.” And she’s like, “Uggghh. Gross. No, I already have a husband.” Her real husband dies of a broken heart because the Emperor’s like, “I’m here to steal your girl.”

And so, she tricks the Emperor, she’s like, “Oh, I’m definitely down to be your wife, just score me a pumpkin, and something super tall to climb up.” And then she jumps off, and she dies, and becomes a bunch of tiny fish, and she’s like, “Later loser. You don’t get to marry me, I’m a hot pumpkin bitch.” The moral of this story is that now you can just not text people back and you can save yourself the trouble of becoming a bunch of fish.

Now, moving on to bigger, and gianter topics, what about them big ol’ honkin’ pumps?

Alie: How do people grow those huge giant pumpkins?

Anne: Oh, that’s quite an effort. They do have seeds for those, however they don’t necessarily grow to be big on their own, you have to kind of baby them along. One of the things a lot of people do is that once the pumpkin starts growing, they have to keep it turned, and they have to keep it moving so that it doesn’t squash [*ba-dum-TSH!*] its own leaves and everything and prevent it from growing. They have to put something under it; it could be cloth, it could be

hay or whatever, but they put something under it. Some of them feed the pumpkins with milk.

Alie: What?!

Anne: Yeah, they do! They do. There's a lot of different ways they can do things, and of course, growing the biggest pumpkin is a long-standing thing that's happened. Oh! And back in the early colonial days, when people would get their hair cut, they used to put half a pumpkin on top of their heads, and they even named the town Pumpkinshire, because that's how they would cut their hair. They would just cut it around the pumpkin like that.

Aside: PS, New Haven in particular, was known for this lewk. And like Instagram photos of rosé at brunch, it spread quickly and gave New Englanders the nickname, pumpkinheads. Now, Boston, hi! Hi Boston. You were once known as Pumpkinshire. So, the next time you enjoy some baked beans from Beantown, just think wow, you could be pumpkin munchin' instead. So, let's say you need a haircut in several months, so you've decided to grow a pumpkin. Does Anne have any tips?

First, she says, have a space about four feet wide, and 30 or 40 feet long. Or, *or*, you can train your vines to grow in a circle around the rest of the garden. Isn't that cute? She says plant five or six seeds in each mound, and when they start to sprout, you gotta thin them out, and pluck a couple. Let only the best two grow. She says it's going to be heartbreaking, but it's worth it.

Her book has more growing tips about hot-capping them, coddling them in cold weather, keeping them cozy as they start their journey to pumpkintown, or I guess Pumpkinshire.

Anne: They grow into the fall, and there's a few types that can even grow into the winter. It just depends how they're grown, and where they're grown, and what they put into it, to how they will grow.

Alie: Do you have a favorite movie involving a pumpkin?

Anne: I guess *Cinderella* mainly. I think that's everybody's favorite, her and that pumpkin carriage. [*clip from Cinderella, music and singing: "You can do magic, believe it or not, bippidee bopidee boo!"*] That's pretty classic. I can't think of any others that I've seen right offhand. That's one I've always liked a lot.

Aside: The tale of Cinderella dates back over 2,000 years, and has taken various forms, many of which involve this future princess having a dead mom, who's reincarnated into a talking fish. Kind of like those Big Mouth Billy Bass things, but it's your parent chatting you up from the grave, and shit-talking your dad's awful new wife.

Now, the version with the pumpkin carriage was far from a Walt Disney invention, so don't give him props. That part of the story was whipped up in the 1600s in France.

Alie: What about pumpkin carving tips?

Anne: Pumpkin carving tips, I'm not good at carving pumpkins, but I'll tell you why. I have carved a pumpkin or two, but after a while, I got to where I didn't really want to carve them. I really wanted to paint them or to do something else with them. For some reason, I just didn't like to cut them up unless I was cooking them.

Alie: You know, you are not the only cucurbitologist I have heard say that. I understand that there's a movement to cook, not carve. It's like, you put all this water and resources into this, you're just going to let it rot on the porch?

Anne: That's true! That's true.

Aside: Tempera, not to be confused with tempura, or acrylic paint works well on pumpkins. And if you're like, "Why am I seeing so many turquoise-colored pumpkins? What's this trend?" That is the Teal Pumpkin Project, and on someone's porch it's a sign that there are non-food treats being given out. So, if your kiddo, or shamelessly, you, trolling your neighborhood as an adult for goodies, is allergic to peanuts, or gluten, those houses are like, "I got you covered with a fake tattoo, some silly putty." Keep an eye out for those.

And let's say you've painted a face on a pumpkin, you've scrubbed it all off, and now you want to yum it up.

Anne: You can cook any size pumpkin. You're gonna have to cut it up a lot more to get it in a pan. You can cook it, but it's like the difference between, say, steak, where fillet mignon is going to cook up a lot nicer than a great big old ten-pound steak. Just partly because of the way it's structured and all.

You can cook a good pumpkin even from the big pumpkins, but you need to process it a lot differently. You're probably going to use something like a pressure cooker, or you're going to dry it and use it that way and grind it up as flour. Or you're going to do something slightly different from what you do with a smaller pumpkin. The smaller pumpkins are really delicious.

When we were in Virginia, that's one of the things I did, was we continued to drive along after I got my pumpkin on that country road, and off to the left, I saw where they had picked all the pumpkins, but they had left these little tiny green ones. So, we went and got the little tiny green ones that were still... they were growing, but they weren't going to pick them. They just left them there.

We took them home and steamed them. Best thing I ever ate! They were absolutely delicious. Each size, each type will be a little different. That's part of the magic, too. There's nothing that you can say, "Well they're all like this." No, they're not all like this. They're all different. Seeds are different within them. Seeds dry differently, seeds have different shapes. They're all kind of the same shape, but there are pumpkins that have different shaped seeds. There's a lot of magic.

Alie: So many! Can I ask you questions from listeners?

Anne: Sure!

Aside: Real quick, before we get to Patreon questions, we may have a few words about some sponsors of the show who make it possible for us to donate each week to a cause of the ologist's choosing, and this week Anne chose Shriners Hospitals for Children, because children and their sense of magic and wonder have a special place in her giant heart. Shriners Hospitals for Children is a network of 22 non-profit medical facilities across North America, so thank you to Anne for choosing them, and to some of the sponsors for making it possible.

[Ad Break]

Okay, let's get to your questions.

Alie: Meg Mahally [phonetic] asks, and I think a lot of people probably have this same question:

Aside: They did, and they include Jonathan and Amber Meade, Kalen Church, Jen S, Ellen Silva, Rayden Marcum, Kyra Dye, Laura Springer, and Rosemary Galten. Y'all wanted to know:

Alie: Where did the jack-o-lantern originate?

Anne: The jack-o-lantern actually originated a long time ago, and we think back around when Stonehenge and all that was active, let me put it that way. They think that it goes back that far, and that "Jack" was comparable to the Devil, and he had to be, sort of, punished. He had to carry around a light so that people wouldn't be afraid of him, that they would know he was coming. ["Heeeeeeeere's Johnny!"] It goes back a long way. Again, we only know from things that have been written, and we don't know in a lot of cases, how truly accurate they are. I'm doing my best to give a correct answer.

Aside: It's also been said that Irish and Scottish kids used to carve their jack-o-lanterns out of turnips or potatoes. And let me tell ya, they look like tiny baby mummy heads, and are so much scarier, by so much many multitudes, than any melon-headed Ichabod Crane figure.

In this tale of Jack and the Devil: some versions say a guy named Jack tricked the Devil into buying him a beer, and then trapped the Devil in a tree, and the Devil was like, "I am so pissed!" And so the Devil condemned Jack to wander the earth, just hoofin' it around, carrying a hot coal in a turnip, kind of like a smoldering earth-purse, filled with hellfire.

Alie: Is that to mimic the devil-Jack's lantern?

Anne: Probably, and also so that it would light the way for people in the dark in the wintertime. It wasn't really like Halloween as we know it now. It used to be called Samhain, and it was connected with Celtic people. It was a different sort of holiday then.

Alie: That is so interesting.

Aside: Okay, quick aside: Samhain, also pronounced 'sow-in', is a Gaelic festival and it celebrates the Celtic pagan new year, and the end of the harvest season, and into the cold times. And feasts are had, costumes are donned, fairies are appeased, neighbors are shaken down for treats, and dead spirits are invited to come kick it before they cross over.

If you're like, "Day of the Dead, *Día de Muertos!*" what a nutty coincidence, it's the same day. Hmm.. That Mexican holiday, honoring and celebrating the gone-and-not-forgotten, used to be celebrated in the beginning of summer, pre-Spanish-colonization, but gradually it got moved to late October to fit in with Western Halloweeny things. So, if you're into a painting project, Day of the Dead skull pumpkins? Cute as hell, or in this case, heaven. Hopefully. Depending on your relatives.

Alie: Naomi Bury wants to know: What's the deal with white and pink pumpkins? How do they make them like that?

Anne: They don't make them, they cross-pollinate them, and they grow new varieties when they can. White pumpkins have been something that they wanted to develop for a long time, and they finally were able to. They've had red pumpkins, reddish... let's put it this way, they're more red than they are orange, so if they cross the red with the white, chances are they'll get the pink. But you don't see many pink. It's more rare. So, if you get a chance to get a pink pumpkin, by all means, get one.

Aside: These, by the by, are called Porcelain Doll F1 varieties, or Rascal F1s. And they are light, light peachy pink, lumpy, but hearty with deep ribbing. If you google them, the porcelain doll pumpkin, they look a little like my butt. I found a website called PinkPumpkinPatch.org, and it encourages growers to donate a portion of their proceeds of pink pumpkin sales to breast cancer charities and research, because October.

For more about breast cancer, listen to the Surgical Oncology episode from last October with surgeon Dr. Donna-Marie Manasseh, who is full of warmth and charm.

Okay. This next question was also asked by Colleeneebiee.

Alie: Ivey Crutchfield wants to know: How can I make my jack-o-lantern last longer?

Anne: Last longer? Paint! Paint its face. Keep it in a cool, dry temperature if possible, and then when you see that it's not going to last forever and ever, go ahead and do something with it. Do something with the seeds, dry the seeds in the oven, dry the seeds and use them, you can paint them, you can dry them, you can eat them, you can salt them, you can use them in recipes, and you can make jewelry out of them. Make really cool jewelry with wooden beads and so forth.

Alie: With pumpkin seeds?! What?!

Anne: Oh yeah, absolutely. They're beautiful! You can thread them really well. You use a big needle, but the needle will go right through.

Alie: Cool, I never knew that!

Anne: Yep yep!

Aside: Okay, side note, I looked these up, and they look kind of like puka shells mixed with Smarties on an elastic, and they're hella cool. People are out there making floral brooches out of pumpkin seeds, and if you're ever in a long line, or you're stranded in a bog, just nom on that necklace, man. Fend off some parasites while you're at it.

Alie: Chris Brewer wants to know: Do you watch *It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown* every year?

Anne: Ohhh, my god. Is there anything else that's better? That is my all-time favorite, is Charlie Brown and the Great Pumpkin.

[clip from It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown: "Each year, the Great Pumpkin rises out of the pumpkin patch that he thinks is the most sincere. He's gotta pick this one! He's got to! I don't see how a pumpkin patch can be more sincere than this one! You can look all around, and there's not a sign of hypocrisy. Nothing but sincerity as far as the eye can see."]

Anne: There's just nothing like it for the holidays!

Alie: This is the best time of year. I'm a November baby as well, and I have a theory that November birthdays love fall.

Anne: Absolutely we do! We do.

Alie: Okay, thank you for backing my theory up. I took a poll, and not everyone agreed with me.

Anne: Oh no!

Aside: I'm telling you, it's a thing. Ask people at your next awkward business dinner, or when you're on a jury and you've got some time to kill. This next question was also asked by

patrons Morgan, Ashley, Kaydee Coast, Sam Taylor, Laura Kinney, and Joe Porfido, who simply wrote: What's with pumpkin guts?

Alie: Jacob Farmer wants to know: Why is it sometimes really easy to get the goop out of the inside of the pumpkin, and sometimes it's really hard?

Anne: [*laughing*] Because the pumpkin hasn't either fully matured, and there are some varieties... Think about making spaghetti noodles. If you take them out too early, they're really hard to get out of the pan and they're harder to deal with. If you get them out when they're just right, then they're pretty easy to deal with. It's possible that the pumpkin isn't fully ripe. If the skin is really rough, and really thick, sometimes it doesn't want to let go of the seed.

Alie: That's great advice. I never realized that. Deanna Juan wants to know: What is your favorite pumpkin or pumpkin-flavored food? And how do you feel about pumpkin spice's popularity? Everything being pumpkin spice flavor.

Anne: Oh, pumpkin spice flavor! I like it, of course. I'm not as crazy about the pumpkin drinks. I do like them.

Aside: Okay, audio note. In addition to the white noise gurgling fish tank, a grandfather clock just abruptly joined the autumn symphony, and so we snipped it out. But I will paraphrase her answer, Anne's not big on PSLs, but she'll take a pumpkin spice latte as an occasional treat. She also has tons of recipes in her *Pumpkin, Pumpkin* book, and she started telling me about jamming stuff into little pumpkins like her mom used to do.

Anne: You have to use small pumpkins and you stuff the with... just like you would a bell pepper, and you cook them like a bell pepper.

Alie: Dang, I'm gonna try that!

Anne: And pumpkin chili is another favorite of mine.

Alie: Pumpkin chili?!

Anne: There's a lot. I have a lot of favorites. [*"It might get ugly."*]

Alie: Wesley Whitman has a question, I feel like this is a heated question: Pumpkin pie, or sweet potato pie, which is better?

Anne: Actually, I love both. I really love both. To me, I'll take either one! I think... you know what, because sweet potatoes are fabulous. Yams are fabulous, and there's so many things you can do with them, so many ways you can cook them. I guess one thing I haven't done yet with pumpkins, and I just thought about it when you mentioned sweet potatoes, is nowadays you can buy sweet potato fries. You've probably had them. I've never made pumpkin fries, so that's a thought.

Alie: Dang!

Anne: That may have to go in the next edition!

Alie: Yeah, someone out there with a deep fryer!

Aside: [*intercom voice effect*] Announcement! Everyone, sit down, gather yourselves, I've got something to tell you. Pumpkin fries do exist!

You can even bake them at home if you don't have access to a commercial fryer. This is big news, we're all gonna do this. Also, we had a few questions about the best autumn sport. This was asked by Justin "World Championship" Walker, and Michael "Trebuchet" Sherman.

Alie: Nathan Bronec, who is also my cousin, wants to know: How do they create thick wall hybrid pumpkins for Punkin Chunkin? Have you heard of Punkin Chunkin? What do you think?

Anne: Oh, absolutely! My second edition book had a picture of the Punkin Chunkin competition. Any large pumpkin, if it's still very firm and very ripe, it's going to be a good chunker. [laughs] They don't generally have thin shells. There are some that do, but they tend to be smaller, and they tend to be not well. They're not healthy. A healthy pumpkin is a chunker!

Alie: I'm going to get that tattooed on myself. How do you feel about the band Smashing Pumpkins?

Anne: Oh, I like that a lot. I think that's really cool.

Alie: A couple more questions if that's ok?

Anne: Oh sure!

Alie: Isabelle Holper wants to know: Is it the most underrated vegetable?

Anne: Well, it's not a vegetable, but yes, it's definitely underrated. It's really high in vitamin content, and a lot of vegetarians do recognize the value of it in meals and the many ways you can use it in a meal.

Alie: Becky Woodruff has a great question. She wants to know: What's with those bags of teeny tiny pumpkins in the produce aisle? Are they baby pumpkins? Or does that type naturally grow to that size?

Anne: Those are a special variety. They grow them that way, they're never going to get big, they're grown to be small like that. Those last pretty much a long time, because they are small, they don't tend to rot, especially if you don't carve them up. If you're just having them sitting there.

Alie: They're like little desk pumpkins.

Anne: They'll last.

Aside: Okay, side note: what are those tiny, tiny pumpkins, that Linda from accounting has on her desk from August 31st until December 1st? They have many names, among them: baby boo, bumpkin, munchkin, baby pam, we be little, hooligan, mischief, trickster. Again, supporting my theory that you can just name a new pumpkin after your cat. Also, you know those weird teeny ones that grow on sticks, that are always in the floral department? Those are eggplants! Which are berries. Trust no one. [*"Trust no one!"*]

Alie: Victoria Helin wants to know: Have you heard the fact that people used to give pumpkins to their significant others to propose to them?

Anne: I haven't heard that one, but it's very possible because pumpkins were used in so many ways.

Alie: I'll look into that.

Aside: I couldn't find anything historical about promising one's future 'til death with a pumpkin, but it did lead me down this syrupy sweet internet hole to a website that gave stumped would-be fiancés ideas of how to propose via pumpkin. Like, carving the question and then turning it around. You could cut a hole in the bottom of a pumpkin, and then hide a ring in the slimy guts and have them carve it from the top. Or you could rent a pumpkin field and spell a message out via dozens of pumpkins and then ride over it in an air balloon, if you

want to spend your entire wedding budget before they even say yes. Now, you might be out of your gourd, but perhaps it's worth a try if they love you, warts and all. Okay, speaking of which:

Alie: Breann Wharton wants to know: Why do pumpkins get the weird wart-looking thingies?

Anne: Well, it's partly how they're grown, and also the variety. Some pumpkins are going to be very lumpy and bumpy because it's part of their genetic makeup. And others will have a really smooth skin. I like the ones that have little wart thingies on them because they're different. They're their own little characters, and to me it makes them look more interesting.

Alie: So, you love 'em warts and all.

Anne: Yep!

Aside: I looked this up, because Ella Sugerma and Sara also had questions, and pumpkin warts are called, you ready for this? Warts. They're just called warts. They can be caused by water imbalances, viruses, bugs, or just genetics, but these pumpkins all deserve hugs anyway.

Alie: Alex Allen asked: Could you give a shout-out for our local native *Cucurbita foetidissima*? Does that sound familiar?

Anne: Not that one, but again there's all kinds of new ones out.

Aside: Okay, the one he's talking about is the stinking gourd, the buffalo gourd, the calabazilla, coyote gourd, fetid gourd, and other colorful names. It's a small, bitter little thing, and folks are looking into its high oil content, or the carbohydrates in the root stores, as a source for biofuel. So one day, perhaps, this dream of a pumpkin carriage will come true. Glass slippers? You always have platform Lucite heels. Anyway, between new advancements with old pumpkins, or new varieties being developed, Anne says she can hardly keep up.

Anne: There's new types coming out every single year, so I'd be putting out a new edition every year, and that's too much work! I want to play and have fun!

Alie: Ashley wants to know: Can you eat the guts of a pumpkin?

Anne: Oh yeah, it depends on how you cook it. If you've ever eaten spaghetti squash or some of those, you can essentially eat the innards of the pumpkin, yeah.

Alie: That's amazing. I didn't know that!

Anne: You can eat them, it's not quite like eating an acorn squash or one of those, it's not going to be quite the same. Yeah, you can eat them. [*"I will personally gut every one of you."*]

Aside: So, a pumpkin is a berry, and also a squash, but *not* a vegetable, but some patrons also had questions about pumpkins and gourds, such as Sarah Chadd, Dylan Howes, Elizabeth LaPlume, Emma Gildesgame, and Delilah Green, who simply typed: Those little gray pumpkins, and the ones with the bumps all over them. That's the question.

Alie: One last question, pumpkins and gourds, are they different? Or is a pumpkin a gourd?

Anne: Oh yeah, they're very different. Gourds are more closely related to squash, but they're not even that either, they're their own little thing, and they have a very, very hard shell. When they are ripe, they're very, very hard. You don't eat gourds, generally speaking. But you can paint on them, you can carve them, you can do all kinds of things like that. They have their

creative side too. I love gourds, I've seen some absolutely fabulous gourd art, carved, painted, and otherwise.

Alie: When do you start decorating for Halloween?

Anne: I start as soon as I can get my hands on a pumpkin.

Alie: *[laughs]* You don't have one yet this year, right?

Anne: I don't have one. We don't have a car right now; we're waiting for that to come home from the shop. So, I haven't been able to get there, but when I do – and plus, if I go in the grocery store, I may not find that perfect pumpkin. I may have to go to several places before I've found what I want. I don't know what color it's going to be this year, or what shape, or the size. I'm going to have to see them. It's going to just have to kind of feel right when I look at it. I don't buy a pumpkin just to buy the pumpkin. It has to speak to me. And when it speaks to me, I know it.

Alie: I love it, that is the way you have to pick out a pumpkin.

Anne: That's the way I pick them out.

Alie: I feel like the pumpkin picks you, really.

Anne: In a way, it does.

Alie: So just go with your heart when it comes to pumpkin picking!

Anne: You do.

Alie: What is the one thing about writing a book about pumpkins, or pumpkin research, or pumpkins themselves, that really annoys you?

Anne: That annoys me? Hmmm, having to do recipes the same way over and over and over again. That would be true if I were writing a bread cookbook, or a steak cookbook, or anything. I do not like to go by the rules. I just throw it in there, and it works.

Alie: Use intuition.

Anne: Yeah, when you cook, to me, cooking is a creative thing. Yes, you're cooking to fill your belly, but you also want to put love and creativity into it, especially if you're cooking for other people in your life that you care about. You're giving of yourself; you're not just giving the food, you're giving of yourself and you want to put your best foot forward, but not in a way that we have to be rigid about how we do it.

Aside: One more thing about Anne's work:

Anne: I love learning things. I'll never stop studying as long as I live. I'll probably never stop cooking, but I'll always cook in my own way. I won't cook by other people's standards.

Alie: Do your own thing!

Anne: Yeah. I love fruitcake. And most people go, "Fruitcake! Eww!" but I love fruitcake, but it's gotta be a certain kind of fruitcake, that has a lot of nuts, a lot of dried fruit, some liquor, and I like it when it's really robust, let me put it that way. I made my first robust fruitcake this last November, and oh my god, I ate the whole thing all by myself.

Alie: Good for you!

Anne: My significant other, Richard, does not like fruitcake but that was okay. I made it for me and I enjoyed every bite. It took me a month to eat it all, but you know what, it was the best fruitcake I ever had. I could write a fruitcake cookbook.

Alie: That's going to be next for you!

Aside: I literally forgot to ask her what her favorite thing about pumpkins are. I sent her a quick email, and she wrote right back and said,

My favorite thing about pumpkins, is that they, like we are, constantly evolve from year to year. They never become boring. And each new generation looks forward to them with great anticipation. Woohoo! Thank you from my heart, Anne always.

Anne: It's been a joy to be here, and I think you're doing a wonderful job, and I wish all the people out there who are getting ready to celebrate the fall, I wish you all a happy autumn, and a happy holiday season. And you know what, do it your way. If you don't like to cook it a certain way, cook it the way you like it. It's okay! You have permission to do that! You have permission to be who you are and who you like to be best.

I was trying to think, one little quick thing: years ago, up in L.A., a bunch of us went out to celebrate Halloween up in Hollywood, and we decided to be a box of crayons. I got to be pink. It's not my favorite color, but I was the pink. And of all the costumes, all of them got all messed up but me, my costume was still pristine when I came back home. I was like, "Oh yeah!" Our costumes went all way down to our ankles. We had to hop along, we couldn't walk, we had to hop all the way through Hollywood, and it was truly one of the best grown-up Halloweens I've had.

Alie: [*laughing heartily*] So go out and enjoy Halloween!

Anne: Yeah, go out and enjoy Halloween. And enjoy every day of your life, because you never know what the next day is going to bring, and enjoy it while you're there to enjoy it, and cooking or having pumpkins, it's what means something to you. What's important, what you make magic in your life. Even if you're not a believer in magic as most people describe it, magic is a joy of living. Just that simple.

Alie: I love that there's magic in a pumpkin patch and in every day.

Anne: Mmm hmmm. And thank you very kindly for attending this interview. It's really appreciated.

Alie: Thanks for letting me come over at 8 o'clock at night with no notice!

Anne: Oh, you know what, that's the kind of thing I like best. I'm very spontaneous, I do things on the spur of the moment, and that's the way I like it.

Alie: Oh, good! It worked out! Thank you so much.

Anne: Okay, take care!

So, ask smart folks stupid questions, because chances are, what caused them to seek the answer was the exact same curiosity that you've got.

To buy Anne Copeland's book, which I definitely suggest you do - it is delightful, as is she - her book is called *Pumpkin, Pumpkin: Folklore, History, Planting Hints, and Good Eating*. There's tons of recipes in it. You'll find a [link in the show notes to the Amazon page](#) where you can order it in

paperback. It's also available on Kindle, and there's also a link in the show notes to the sponsors of the show, and to the [Shriners Hospitals for Children](#). More links, as always, are up at [Alieward.com/Ologies/Cucurbitology](#).

For *Ologies* merch, go to [OlogiesMerch.com](#), or [AlieWard.com](#). Thank you, Shannon Feltus and Boni Dutch of the podcast *You Are That* for managing that. Also, thanks to Hannah Lipow and Erin Talbert for adminning the [Ologies Podcast Facebook group](#). Thank you to assistant editor, Jarrett Sleeper of the podcast *My Good Bad Brain*, and of course to a dude with a lot of guts, but who hates pumpkin guts, Steven Ray Morris of *The Purrrecast*, and *See Jurassic Right*.

The theme song is called "Alie at the Museum," it was written for this podcast by Nick Thorburn of the very good band, Islands. And if you stick around to the end of the episode, you know I tell you a secret.

This week's secret is that to make a carved pumpkin last longer, you can also spray diluted bleach inside. But then you can't have your jack-o-lantern and eat it too. And also, you know when people carve pumpkins to look like they're barfing up their own guts? Whenever I see that, I get physically nauseated. Just thinking about it makes me [*gagging sounds*]. Mission accomplished, Halloween. Terrifying. It's too real. You got me, tricksters.

So, Febreze your scarves, let's meet here next week for another October spookology. It's Spooktober. I'm so excited, they're so good! Oh, they're so good.

Okay. Berbye.

Transcribed by Lauren Fenton.

Edits by Kaydee Coast, who holds this episode in a special place because it was the first time she heard her name on a podcast. And as always; don't lick toads, check your crevices, milk your thumbs, and never apologize for asking questions. Kthxbi.

Some links which you may find of use:

[Johnson O'Connor aptitude testing](#)

[Etymology of pumpkin](#)

[Indigenous folks and pumpkins](#)

[Cucurbita wiki](#)

[Kabocha squasha](#)

[Pumpkin fries: THEY EXIST](#)

[Day of the Dead candied pumpkin](#)

[What is a berry?](#)

[Types of pumpkins](#)

[What can pumpkin seeds do for you?](#)

[Pumpkin seed jewelry](#)

[Why do we dress up?](#)

[Do we gorge more in the cold weather?](#)

[Milk fed pumpkins](#)

[Cucurbita pepo wiki](#)

[Economic Botany article](#)

[Teal Pumpkins](#)

[Painting pumpkins](#)

[Pink pumpkins](#)

[Keltic of Seltic?](#)

[Day of the Dead Pumpkins](#)

[Pumpkin on a stick: actually eggplants which are a fruit](#)

[Bleach your pump](#)

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