



Photo courtesy of Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden

# THE FASHIONABLE PUMPKIN

HEIRLOOM AND SPECIALTY PUMPKINS ARE IN DEMAND AS SEASONAL DÉCOR MOVES FROM PRODUCE BINS TO FABULOUS FLORAL DISPLAYS.

By Debra Prinzing

According to **Johnny's Selected Seeds**, a major vegetable and flower seed supplier based in Winslow, Maine, pumpkins have been a significant fall harvest crop for more than 5,000 years. Edible pumpkins (*Cucurbita pepo* and *C. maxima*) are native to North America. Uncommon Italian, French and Australian varieties have also made their way into autumn's diverse pumpkin palette of colors, sizes and shapes, suitable for carving, baking, seed roasting and even oil extraction. Thanks to breeding and heirloom seed preservation, the Halloween jack-o'-lantern is ready for the runway as a fashionable décor element that appeals to floral customers.

While a popular symbol of traditional fall, harvest and holiday decorations, the creativity that pumpkins offer are endless. You can inspire customer demand by elevating pumpkins as a value-added item. This report introduces several display and merchandising ideas through the Thanksgiving holiday season.

Regardless of your available space or scale of ambition, there is a pumpkin décor concept for everyone.

## A GALLERY OF PUMPKINS

The familiar orange carving pumpkin is a retail standard, appearing in produce departments almost the moment Labor Day weekend has ended. Because of the long storage life of most varieties, pumpkins can be incorporated into merchandising displays, promotions and events throughout the season.

And yes, while every region is home to at least one you-pick pumpkin farm, there are popular destinations that engage consumers far beyond the pumpkin patch, such as various fairy-tale and storybook themes at the **Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden**.

Named one of the "Best Fall Festivals" by *Country Living* Magazine, the "Autumn at the Arboretum" event includes the nationally-acclaimed Pumpkin



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Village featuring pumpkin houses and creative displays incorporating more than 90,000 pumpkins, gourds, squash, cornstalks and a hay bale maze. Not only is the Texas-style event a theatrical presentation of locally grown pumpkin, gourd and squash produce, it attracts more than a quarter-million people, says **Dave Forehand**, Dallas Arboretum's vice president of gardens. The production is extravagant and successful – and may stimulate your own multicolored displays.

### FROM SEED TO TABLE DÉCOR

Accessibility to unique seed varieties is one reason growers are experimenting with the full spectrum of pumpkins – from ghostly white to sage green to paprika orange, as well as streaked, spotted and oddly shaped varieties.

**Foothills Flowers Farm**, based in Everson, Wash., is a specialty cut flower grower whose owners **Sadie Beauregard** and **Paul D'Agnolo** are drawing from past vegetable-farming experience to plant decorative pumpkins for the floral trade. This year, the farm is growing five uncommon varieties, including 'Jarrahdale', 'Long Island Cheese', 'Musque de Provence' and 'Triamble' pumpkins and 'Sokichi Shiro' squash.

"Most of them are edible, but we offer them as specialty ornamentals," Sadie explains. "These are really popular at the [floral] wholesale market." Buyers include florists; wedding and event designers; and venues, such as country clubs, which purchase the novelty pumpkins for seasonal decorating, she says. Advance planning is required to time pumpkin harvest for late September through November. "We start the seeds indoors and then transplant into the field in May," she says.

### JUST ADD SUCCULENTS

**Katie Elliott** and **Teresa Engbretson** are farmer-florists who grow pumpkins for sale at farmers' markets and for use in their own on-farm workshops and events at **My Garden Over Floweth**, located in Paterson, Wash.

The women began teaching succulent-pumpkin design workshops about three years ago. If you have any doubt about the popularity of this unique plant combination, search Instagram for the hashtag #succulentpumpkins or take a quick trip through Pinterest. You'll discover a world of ideas for pairing long-lasting succulent plants with long-lasting pumpkins.

At first, the "planted" pumpkin was at the heart of this craze, but retailers and florists have discovered a downside to carving away a planting hole for potting



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1. Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden's popular "Autumn at the Arboretum" festival features over-the-top seasonal decor with pumpkins of all colors and sizes, including storybook houses in a Pumpkin Village.

2. Uncommon and heirloom pumpkins on display at the Seattle Wholesale Growers Market, including selections from Foothills Flowers Farm.

3. A fall wedding centerpiece features a white pumpkin, succulents and an herbal wreath, designed by My Garden Over Floweth. © Sevllynn Photography



## // Sourcing //



4. Seasonal display of just-picked pumpkins decorated with sheet moss, succulents and Sedum.  
Designed and photographed by Debra Prinzing.

soil and succulents. “People used to complain that the pumpkins wouldn’t last, but we’re not carving it and letting it rot away,” Katie points out. Rather, My Garden Over Floweth’s workshops teach a simple technique involving glue, moss and succulent cuttings.

“We have been making the succulent pumpkins for the last three years, and people still cannot get enough of them,” says Katie. “They are a great Thanksgiving tablescape piece, and we sell them at our fall events and often team up with local wineries for girls’-night-out events.”

Katie and Teresa teach workshops costing from \$40-\$45 per student. They also create succulent-topped mini pumpkins for **Yoke’s Fresh Market**, a Spokane-based regional grocery chain. Katie says she has been expecting the succulent pumpkin craze to wane, but it hasn’t yet.

“I think the popularity is the cuteness factor; it’s often something people haven’t seen before. They are long-lasting decorations through November, and many people leave them out through Christmas, especially the white pumpkins, and add fairy lights. When you’re done with the pumpkin, pluck off the moss and the succulent cuttings and repot them. So the customer is getting something she can have forever.”

**DETAILS**

Dallas Arboretum  
[dallasarboretum.org](http://dallasarboretum.org), @thedallasarboretum

Johnny’s Selected Seeds  
[johnnyseeds.com](http://johnnyseeds.com), @johnnys\_seeds

Foothills Flowers Farm  
[foothillsflowersfarm.com](http://foothillsflowersfarm.com), @foothills\_flowers

My Garden Over Floweth  
[mygardenoverfloweth.com](http://mygardenoverfloweth.com), @mygardenoverfloweth

Debra Prinzing is a Seattle-based writer, speaker and leading advocate for American Grown Flowers. She is the producer of *slowflowers.com*. Each Wednesday, approximately 2,500 listeners tune into her “Slow Flowers Podcast,” available for free download at her website, [debraprinzing.com](http://debraprinzing.com), or on iTunes and via other podcast services. In 2016, GWA: The Association for Garden Communicators inducted her into its Hall of Fame. She is the author of 10 books, including *Slow Flowers* and *The 50 Mile Bouquet*.





## Decorate a Pumpkin with Succulents

### STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

**MATERIALS:** Pumpkin with short or curved stem  
Decorative sheet moss  
A selection of succulents and *Sedum* cuttings

**TOOLS:** Floral clippers or snips  
Oasis Floral Adhesive glue or glue gun



**STEP ONE** Tear or cut sections of sheet moss so there is enough to cover the “top” of a pumpkin. The moss should fill the area where succulents will be placed.



**STEP THREE** Take small cuttings of *Sedum* plants and cut larger “rosette-style” succulents from their stems (remove soil with a brush or paper towel). Determine the arrangement of plants and cuttings before you begin to glue and attach them to the pumpkin.



**STEP TWO** Working quickly, apply glue to the pumpkin in a circular pattern. Press moss sections into the glued area, creating a base for succulents.



**STEP FOUR** Begin with the first “focal” succulent, such as a larger rosette (*Sempervivum* or *Echeveria*). Squeeze glue onto the back of the piece, and press into place. Continue with each cutting, pressing it into place and hiding smaller stems under larger succulents.

**STEP FIVE** Allow glue to dry overnight before moving or displaying. The succulents will produce aerial roots that will anchor into the moss. Spray with a light mist once a week. If you display the pumpkins outside under a covered porch, the succulents will draw moisture from the air and can be misted less frequently. When the pumpkin loses its shape or begins to decay, gently remove the succulents and replant them.

Project designed and photographed by Debra Prinzing