

The Fall Pumpkin Dessert Planner

A printable companion to our pumpkin dessert guide: shopping list, puree and spice cards, bake times, custard doneness, flavour pairings and a make-ahead timeline.

Print this and keep it in your baking folder. It does not repeat the article. It gives you the lists, ratios, temperatures and timelines you want your hands on while the mixer is running and your fingers are sticky.

Shopping List

Section	Item	On hand?
Produce	Sugar pumpkin or butternut squash, 2 lb (if roasting your own)	
Produce	Apples or pears for pairing desserts	
Produce	Oranges, for zest	
Canned	Plain pumpkin puree, 15 oz cans (buy 3)	
Canned	Evaporated milk, 12 oz (pie custard)	
Canned	Sweetened condensed milk (no-bake bars)	
Pantry	All-purpose flour (3 cups)	
Pantry	Granulated sugar (2 cups)	
Pantry	Light brown sugar (2 cups, packed)	
Pantry	Powdered sugar (2 cups)	
Pantry	Pure maple syrup (small bottle)	
Pantry	Neutral oil (1 cup)	
Pantry	Baking soda and baking powder	
Pantry	Cornstarch (custards and fillings)	
Pantry	Graham crackers or gingersnaps (crumb crust)	
Pantry	Dark or semisweet chocolate, bar or chunks	
Pantry	Rolled oats and shredded coconut	
Spices	Cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, allspice, cloves	
Spices	Cardamom (optional, for chai style)	
Fridge	Eggs, a dozen (plus 2 spare)	
Fridge	Butter, unsalted (1 lb)	
Fridge	Cream cheese, block (8 oz, buy 2)	

Section	Item	On hand?
Fridge	Heavy cream, 1 pint (plus 1 for whip)	
Fridge	Whole milk (1 cup)	
Fridge	Pecans or walnuts (2 cups)	
Fridge	Dried cranberries (1 cup)	

Card 1: Which Pumpkin, and How Wet It Is

The single biggest variable in pumpkin baking is water. Two cups of puree can differ by a quarter cup of liquid depending on what is in the can or the squash.

Form	Water	Best used for	Watch out for
Canned puree	About 90 percent	Everything: pies, cakes, cookies, bars	Scrape the can out fully; the last two tablespoons matter
Canned pie filling	Set with starch, already sweet	Nothing in this planner	Pre-sweetened and pre-spiced. Do not substitute
Home-roasted sugar pumpkin	Variable, often higher	Loaves, muffins, cakes	Drain 30 minutes in a sieve or the centre sinks
Home-roasted butternut	Lower than pumpkin	Pies, custards, cheesecake	Sweeter and less earthy; cut added sugar by 2 tbsp
Home-roasted kabocha	Low, dense and sweet	Cheesecake, mousse, no-bake	Very sweet; cut sugar by about a quarter

Test your puree: spoon two tablespoons onto a paper towel. If a wet ring spreads past the puree within a minute, drain the batch before you bake with it.

Card 2: The Spice Blend

Measured per cup of puree, so it scales to any size of dessert. Mix a jar at six times these amounts and it lasts one season.

Spice	Per cup of puree	Jar mix (6 batches)
Ground cinnamon	1 tsp	2 tbsp
Ground ginger	1/2 tsp	1 tbsp
Ground nutmeg	1/4 tsp	1 1/2 tsp
Ground allspice	1/8 tsp	3/4 tsp
Ground cloves	1 pinch, about 1/16 tsp	3/8 tsp
Ground cardamom (optional)	1/8 tsp	3/4 tsp

Cloves are the loudest note in the jar. Measure them into a spoon, never shake them straight in. Doubling the cloves is what makes a dessert taste medicinal.

Write the mixing date on the jar. Ground spice kept over a hob loses most of its punch in six months, and tired spice is the most common reason a pumpkin dessert tastes flat.

Card 3: Bake Times by Format

Format	Pan	Oven	Time	Done when
Loaf	9 x 5 inch	350 F	60 to 70 min	Skewer has moist crumbs
Mini loaves	3 x 5 x 3 inch	350 F	35 to 45 min	Skewer clean, springs back
Muffins	12-cup tin	375 F	20 to 24 min	Domed and clean skewer
Square cake	8 x 8 inch	350 F	35 to 40 min	Springs back at centre
Bundt	10-cup	325 F	50 to 60 min	Pulls from the wall
Sheet cake	9 x 13 inch	350 F	28 to 34 min	Springs back, edges release
Cookies	Two lined sheets	350 F	12 to 14 min	Set edges, soft centre
Bars	9 x 13 inch	350 F	30 to 35 min	Filling barely wobbles
Custard pie	9 inch deep dish	425 F then 350 F	15 min then 40 to 50 min	Centre reads 175 F
Cream pie	9 inch, no bake	Chill only	4 hours minimum	Filling holds a slice

Dark metal and glass pans run hot. Drop the oven 25 F and start checking five minutes early. Trust the skewer and the thermometer, never the clock.

Card 4: Custard Doneness and Chill Times

Dessert	Pull it from the oven at	Chill before serving
Classic pumpkin custard pie	Centre 175 F, still loose in the middle	4 hours, up to overnight
Pumpkin cheesecake	Centre 150 F, 2 inch wobble	Overnight, then 8 hours cold
Pumpkin cream pie	Never baked; cook the base to 200 F on the hob	4 hours minimum
No-bake mousse	Never baked	2 hours to set, 4 to firm
Bread pudding	Centre 170 F, custard set at the edge	20 minutes, warm is best
Icebox bars	Never baked	4 hours, overnight for clean cuts

A cracked custard is an overcooked custard. Pull it while the centre still shivers, and cool it slowly in the switched-off oven with the door ajar.

Card 5: Texture Rules for Cookies and Bars

- Blot the puree on paper towel before it goes into a cookie dough. Cookies have no room for extra water.
- Chill the dough at least 60 minutes. Warm pumpkin dough spreads into one flat sheet.
- Bake to set edges only. A pumpkin cookie that looks done in the oven is dry by the time it cools.
- For bars, press the crumb base firmly with the flat of a measuring cup so it does not crumble when sliced.
- Cool bars completely, then refrigerate an hour before cutting, and wipe the knife between cuts.
- Toast nuts before they go anywhere near the batter. Raw nuts go soft inside a wet crumb.
- Toss chocolate chips in a spoonful of flour so they stay suspended instead of sinking.
- Cool custards and pies on a rack, not the hob, or the residual heat keeps cooking the centre.

Card 6: What Pairs With Pumpkin

Pumpkin brings	Reach for	Go easy on
Earthy sweetness	Brown butter, maple, dark brown sugar	White sugar alone, which reads thin
Soft, dense crumb	Toasted pecans, walnuts, pepitas	Large wet fruit pieces, which sink
Faint acidity	Buttermilk, sour cream, cream cheese	Extra lemon, which fights the spice
Warm spice	Orange zest, coffee, espresso powder	Vanilla as the only note
Mild flavour	Bourbon, dark rum, molasses	Strong liqueurs that swamp it
Deep orange colour	Dried cranberries, white chocolate	Green colourings, which turn muddy

Bloom the spice in melted butter or oil for 30 seconds before it meets the batter. Warm fat pulls the aromatics out of cinnamon and nutmeg, and the difference in the finished dessert is unmistakable.

Make-Ahead Timeline

Up to 3 months ahead	Roast and puree your own squash. Freeze in 2-cup portions, pressed flat. Thaw overnight in the fridge, then drain before baking.
Up to 1 month ahead	Mix the spice jar. Toast and chop the nuts and freeze them. Make and freeze crumb crust bases in the pan, wrapped twice.
Up to 1 week ahead	Bake loaves, muffins and cookies. Cool completely, wrap well, and freeze whatever you will not eat within four days.
2 days ahead	Make the cream cheese frosting, the maple glaze and any caramel sauce. Refrigerate in jars and bring to room temperature before using.
1 day ahead	Bake custard pies and cheesecake. They need the full chill to set the centre, and both are better on day two.
Day of serving	Whip the cream, glaze the bundt, toast the last of the nuts, and assemble anything with a crumb topping so it stays crisp.
Never make ahead	Do not freeze a glazed or frosted dessert, and do not assemble a cream pie more than a day ahead if you want a firm slice.

Storage and Freezer Chart

What	How to store it	Keeps
Loaf or quick bread	Parchment then foil, or an airtight tin at room temperature	4 days
Sliced loaf	Stand it cut side down on the board	3 days
Muffins	Airtight tin at room temperature	3 days
Cookies	Airtight tin with a slice of bread to keep them soft	1 week
Bars, crumb topped	Refrigerate loosely covered so the top stays crisp	4 days
Custard pie	Refrigerate covered once fully cool	3 days
Cheesecake	Refrigerate under a dome, away from strong flavours	5 days
Cream pie	Refrigerate covered, no longer than this	2 days
Whole loaf, frozen	Foil, then a zip bag with the air pressed out	3 months
Slices, frozen	Interleaved with parchment so they do not fuse	3 months
Cookie dough, frozen	Portioned balls, frozen on a tray then bagged	3 months
Puree, frozen	2-cup portions, pressed flat, labelled with the date	6 months

Never glaze or frost something you intend to freeze. The glaze weeps as it thaws and leaves a sticky, wet surface. Freeze the bake plain and finish it after it comes back to room temperature.

Serving and Plating Checklist

- Bring cold desserts out 20 minutes before serving. Pumpkin tastes muted at fridge temperature.
- Warm the knife under hot water and dry it before cutting cheesecake or cream pie.
- Serve whipped cream on the side, not on top, if the dessert has a crumb topping.
- Add the crisp element last: toasted nuts, a shard of caramel or a crumbled gingersnap.
- Cut bars and brownies with a long knife in one press, not a sawing motion.
- Dust with cinnamon through a small sieve held high for an even finish.
- Plate something cold and something crunchy next to a dense slice.
- Note what you changed and how it baked. That is how next autumn's version gets better.

Gift Tags

Cut along the lines and tie one tag to each wrapped loaf or box of cookies with kitchen twine. Plain parchment and a paper tag look better than anything printed.

Baked for you on _____

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