



MEDIA RELEASE

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
MARKET DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

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EDIBLE AND PERENNIAL FALL DÉCOR SAVES MONEY, ADDS FUN

NASHVILLE, Tenn. - "Tennessee's 'fun farms' are in their glory throughout October," says Pamela Bartholomew, Tennessee Department of Agriculture. "You can get everything you need for fall – including a good time-- in one place by purchasing fall décor and produce straight from a local farm."

Farms that offer all sorts of autumn décor, from mums and pumpkins to corn stalks, gourds, Indian corn and straw bales dot the state. These farms often offer a variety of traditional farm fun right up through Halloween, as well. Many offer wagon rides, pick-your-own pumpkin patches, corn mazes, farm animal zoos, storytelling and musical evenings and all sorts of outdoor activities.

"Agritourism farmers depend on loyal customers who, once they've had a great farm experience, will return year after year," says Bartholomew, who serves as the state's agritourism coordinator. "These local farmers want to be sure you are satisfied with your purchases, that you have such a good time you'll come back – and that you'll tell all your friends."

Entrance to these farms is free, "and so is the advice of the farmer who grew all those products you want to purchase, which also helps make dollars go farther," says Bartholomew. "One way to justify your purchases is to choose pumpkins and hard squashes you can actually eat, and to buy flowers like mums that can be planted once the holidays are over."

Purchasing mums directly from the straight from the farmer who grew them, for instance, allows customers to can find out which kinds are hardiest. According to Bartholomew, "There are actually some big differences in hardiness between types and even colors of mums. If you choose a hardy variety, you can plant it in a sunny spot and look forward to seeing it next year."

"At a farm, you can talk to the farmer about how you want to use the pumpkins and winter squash you buy. There are so many varieties available now that customers can choose produce they can use well into winter," says Bartholomew.

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Most pumpkins are edible, but many hybrids bred for carving tend to be bland or have little flesh. “Let your local farmer point out the varieties that are grown to be eaten,” says the agritourism coordinator.

A variety of colors and shapes guarantees texture and interest in autumn decorating which, conveniently, includes the most colorful edible pumpkin types. The Australian Blue, or Jarrahdale pumpkin, is truly a blue color. It’s a medium sized, often flattened fruit. An old French variety called Rouge Vif d’Etampes, or Cinderella pumpkin, is large, somewhat flattened and deeply ridged with an almost neon red-to-pink and orange color.

The Cushaw melon, or sweet potato pumpkin, adds a great touch to a collection of fall produce. Striped in green or gold and shaped like a fat, curvy gourd, it looks nothing like a pumpkin – but according to the experts, it tastes more “pumpkin-y” than real pumpkins.

Names like ‘Sugar’, ‘New England Pie’ and ‘Winter Luxury’ are giveaways for small sized, old varieties still perfect for both cooking and carving. Don’t try to use a pumpkin as a lantern one day and then use it for cooking the next, however; pumpkin should be cooked the same day that it’s cut. Pumpkin is nutritious, freezes well and substitutes for squash and for sweet potatoes in recipes.

To locate Tennessee pumpkins, other autumn décor, or to locate farms with hayrides, corn mazes and other fall fun activities, visit www.picktnproducts.org.

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