Pumpkin science

Source: Ashley Osborne, 4-H youth development specialist

With fall in full swing, pumpkins are a great way to get young people interested in science and learning more about nutrition and local food systems.

You can find many different types of pumpkins throughout the state at farmers markets, orchards or roadside stands. They will vary in size and color depending on their purpose. Pumpkins range from small decorator pieces to pie pumpkins to large carving jack-o-lanterns. It may be fun for younger youth to make comparisons and talk about uses for pumpkins before choosing one to take home.

Pumpkins are a living science experiment. Cut a pumpkin in half and show 4-H’ers different features of the pumpkin. You can also cut a pumpkin blossom in half and show youth the different parts of the flower and how they work together to form a pumpkin. Explain the role bees and other insects play in pollinating pumpkin flowers.

Help youth practice their math skills using pumpkins. Ask your 4-H’er to guess how much a pumpkin weighs and then weigh it. Have youth use a tape measure to find the pumpkin’s circumference and a ruler to measure its height. 4-H’ers can guess how many seeds are inside a pumpkin, and then remove and count them.

Pumpkin foods are common throughout the season. The exciting thing about this is they are also full of nutrients. The filling of pumpkins is an excellent source of vitamin A, which can support healthy eyesight and bone and cell development. It is also a good source of vitamins C, K and E and the minerals magnesium, potassium and iron. Pumpkin seeds are a good source of protein and iron and are often roasted before eating. Prepare a pumpkin-inspired dish with a 4-H’er and talk about the benefits of healthy eating.

For more fun ways to integrate science into everyday life, contact the (COUNTY NAME) office of the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

Educational programs of the Cooperative Extension Service serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expressions, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, or physical or mental disability.

-30-