

How to Recycle Pumpkins for Birds and Wildlife



By [Jill Staake](#)

[Birds & Blooms Editorial Policies](#)

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Don't toss pumpkins after Halloween. Follow these tips for recycling pumpkins for wildlife, including birds, butterflies, deer and squirrels.

Readers Share Ideas for Recycling Pumpkins for Wildlife



Courtesy Katherine Plessner/Country magazine

A squirrel snacks on a pumpkin.

Halloween is approaching, so there's a good chance you will have a pumpkin or two around your house. They make great [fall decorations](#), but once the carving and trick-or-treating is over, don't just toss them in the trash. There are lots of great ideas for recycling pumpkins to benefit wildlife in the weeks ahead.

Discover 4 [garden uses for your old Jack-o-lantern](#).

Share Pumpkin Seeds with Birds

Many people roast and eat pumpkin seeds themselves, but you can also share them with birds. Larger backyard birds like [blue jays](#) love pumpkin seeds, too. [Follow these directions to roast them](#) (no salt or seasoning, please!) and offer on a tray feeder or just sprinkle on the ground for birds to enjoy.

Turn Your Pumpkin into a Bird Feeder



Courtesy Mary Hindle

As suggested by a *Birds & Blooms* reader, cut off the top half of the pumpkin and fill the bottom half with birdseed. Place outside for the birds to enjoy.

Let the pumpkin halves dry and poke drainage holes to prevent moldy birdseed.

Learn how to make your own [pumpkin bird feeder](#).

Feed the Squirrels



Courtesy Mary Hindle

“I cut them open so the squirrels can eat the seeds and will stay away from my bird feeders for a while,” says reader Mike Froio of Rome, New York.

Here’s how to make a super cute, [no-carve owl pumpkin](#).

Share Pumpkins with Butterflies

In warmer climates, offer pumpkin flesh and pulp in your butterfly garden. Simply cut into small pieces and place in a shallow dish for fruit-loving butterflies like [red-spotted purples](#) to enjoy. In areas where butterflies are already gone for the winter,

Cut Up Pumpkins for Wildlife



Jim Cumming / Alamy Stock Photo

You can also offer the pumpkin pieces for other wildlife like deer and rabbits. Place the cut-up pumpkin in an area where you can view the critters that come to feast on your pumpkin.

“I put them in an open field by our home where wildlife roam, and watch the animals enjoy this special fall treat,” says Lynn Smith of Orwigsburg, Pennsylvania.

Bridget Paris of Pilot Knob, New York, says, “I usually get most of my neighbors’ pumpkins, then I cut them up or break them in half for the deer to eat. I love to recycle.”

Feed Carved Pumpkins to Chickens



paulacobleigh/Getty Images

Backyard chickens will be thrilled by this special treat. Be sure to do this while your pumpkin is relatively fresh and has not started to form mold. Chickens love pumpkins seeds, too.

DIY Dog Treats

“I cut pumpkins into strips and dehydrate them for dog treats,” says Sue Adams of Black Diamond, Washington.

Donate Extras to a Local Charity

“After cutting my pumpkins in half so animals don’t get their heads stuck in them, I bring them to our local Audubon Society, where they’re fed to animals,” says Marjorie Cohen of Worcester, Massachusetts.



Courtesy Dana Foreman

[HomeBackyard Projects](#)

Never Throw Away Your Jack-o'-Lantern—This Is Why



By [Lori Vanover](#)

[Birds & Blooms Editorial Policies](#)

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Don't toss out your old Halloween pumpkin after the holiday is over. It's harmful and there are many beneficial ways to reuse them.

Every year, my kids have so much fun selecting pumpkins at our local pumpkin patch. A few days before Halloween, we decide what type of designs to carve into the pumpkins. Our jack-o'-lanterns are then proudly displayed for the holiday, all lit up from the inside.

But after picking out the perfect pumpkin, carving it and displaying it, what do you do with it? You may be surprised to find that there are many uses for your old [jack-o'-lantern](#). Plus learn why throwing a pumpkin in the garbage is actually harmful for our earth and water supply.

Why You Shouldn't Throw Old Pumpkins Away



Courtesy Sherry Holbein

Don't throw pumpkins into your garbage can after Halloween is over.

After Halloween is over, people have leftover pumpkins that they no longer need or want to display. It's fairly common practice to throw them away. After all, won't the pumpkins break down naturally?

Unfortunately, it's not that simple.

According to the University of Illinois Extension, while it's true that pumpkins are an organic waste (not the [decorative plastic ones](#), of course), they produce the potent greenhouse gas methane as they decompose without oxygen in landfills. These decaying pumpkins also leach water that filters through the trash piles and pollutes nearby waterways.

Smash and Compost Pumpkins Instead



Courtesy Mckenna Swafford

Instead of throwing away your pumpkins, it's better to smash them and then use them to [make compost](#). Just make sure you remove candles, ribbons, paint, and any other non-organic materials first. Properly composted pumpkins do not produce methane and contribute to [soil health](#).

If you don't have a compost pile, cut up your pumpkin into smaller pieces. Place these throughout in your garden. The pumpkin pieces will still break down nicely and offer lots of great nutrients.

Backyard tip: Remove pumpkin seeds beforehand if you don't want volunteer vines next summer. If you do want to [save seeds](#) for next year's garden, set aside a handful, rinse with water and allow the seeds to dry in a cool dry place for several weeks. Then [store them](#) in a bag or seed packet to plant next summer.

Dispose of Your Pumpkins Responsibly

Never dump your pumpkins, straw, cornstalks or other fall decorations on private property or in nature preserves. First of all, littering is often a criminal offense. In addition, wild animals are often drawn to the waste and they may get hit by passing traffic.

Other Ways to Repurpose Pumpkins

Make a Pumpkin Planter



Charles Brutlag/Shutterstock

If your gourds aren't ready for the compost pile, add potting soil and flowers, or insert a small potted plant, to create a festive [pumpkin planter](#).

Feed the Birds



Courtesy Victoria Schwinabart

Fill the hollow pumpkin with your favorite kind of birdseed for an easy [DIY bird feeder](#).