

AFTERTASTE



FORSAKEN SEEDS

“When I was a child in Brooklyn and on Long Island, these little pumpkin seeds were kind of ubiquitous,” said Linda Slezak, an avid chef who owns the Red Barn Bed and Breakfast in Jamesport with her husband and who teaches cooking at Martha Clara Vineyards. Slezak’s family is Sephardic Jewish, and her grandmother frequently made dishes using pumpkin. “You wouldn’t cut open a pumpkin and just roast the seeds. The best part is the pumpkin. But I don’t like to waste things. So, if I’m making something with pumpkin, I’ll use the pumpkin pulp and I’ll use the seeds. My family would make them all the time and we all learned how to crack them with our teeth and enjoy what was inside.”

“They are kind of like worry beads for the mouth,” Slezak said. “They keep you busy trying to split them open with your teeth and are a great, crunchy little snack to have when dinner is over and you’re not even hungry any more.”

Despite the sometimes tedious implications, there is a certain logic to roasting pumpkin seeds, as Slezak explains. If you need to roast a pumpkin to use the flesh—for a pie or soup, let’s say—then sooner or later you have to deal with the seeds. After cutting a pumpkin in half, Slezak scoops the seeds into a bowl. And while the two halves of the pumpkin are roasting, she goes to work on the seeds. “It’s a little bit messy. But it’s not that awful. The seeds are



1. Rinse the seeds in a small-hole colander or sieve to remove as much string and pulp as you can.
2. Pat seeds dry with paper towel and spread on a baking sheet to dry out.
3. Preheat oven to 350°, toss the seeds with 2 t. of oil and salt and toast in a baking pan for approximately 20 minutes. Turn them after 5 to 10 minutes.
4. Let cool and serve as a snack.



in a bowl, which keeps them from spreading all over everything.” In Slezak’s household, at least, the job was easy enough for the kids to do. “We children had the job of cleaning and roasting them and it made us feel part of the meal preparation,” she said.

She advises using a strainer to wash off as much of the “gunk” as you can, noting that “you’re not going to get every little bit.” Then, let the seeds air dry, before spreading them on baking trays, seasoning, and roasting. If your timing is good, you can roast them in the same oven that is cooking the pumpkin flesh. (Unlike pumpkin flesh, for which you need a cooking variety of pumpkin, rather than an ornamental Jack O’Lantern, the seeds of all pumpkins seem to be very palatable. Shelled pumpkin seeds, or pepitas, are sold in many gourmet and Latino stores and can be used as a garnish to be eaten whole.)

Most farmstands that remain open through the winter have plenty of pumpkins left. If you don’t see them, be sure to ask. They store well in a cool dry pantry, so stock up. □