

Pumpkins are a fruit that originated in Central America. The name "pumpkin" comes from the Greek word "pepon," meaning a large melon. Also 90% of the pumpkin is made up of water and the yellow-orange flowers that bloom from a pumpkin vine are edible.

## October; the Month of Promise

Ancient farmers were advised to pick the grapes and press the new wine at the Vindemia, the vintage.



Nine months have passed since we began our journey, pacing the agricultural cycle month by month from the times of new growth to maturity and eventual harvest. We now arrive at October, the month of the fall vintage, when the plump juicy grapes that have ripened on the vine during languid summer days are finally plucked and pressed, producing a frothy deep purple new wine. Now the dappled sunlight is noticeably shorter and the cold dark time of winter rapidly approaches. Life in the natural world this month goes underground as animals hunker down for the long haul, birds retreat to warmer climates, and seeds lie dormant awaiting the period of rebirth. We also beat a hasty retreat into the dry, warm confines of home and hearth, driven inside by chilling temperatures and drenching rains. In some regions, an icy crystal blanket covers the fields and trees at the first frost. October portends the bleak winter season, while nature herself compels us to consider endings and death.

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In ancient Roman times, October marked an end to an intensely active period for farming as well as travel, commerce, and military conquest. During this fall month, farmers busily prepared for the coming of winter, making certain of adequate supplies and provisions to last through the dark cold months looming just ahead.



Illinois grows more pumpkins than any other state in the country. It harvests nearly 12,300 acres of fruit.

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Likewise, the threat of snow and treacherous weather brought a halt to much of the travel and trade in the ancient world. In fact, in the earliest days of Rome, military campaigns lasted from March through October, when the Roman soldiers returned to their homes and farms. October was the month when many activities came to an abrupt end. Appropriately, the Isia, the sacred rites to the goddess Isis and her days of mourning for her lost husband, Osiris, were held in ancient Rome during the final days of this month.

Isis was originally an Egyptian goddess worshiped by the people living along the Nile River since prehistoric times. During the second and first centuries B.C.E., however,

her cult spread throughout the Mediterranean, reaching Italy, where her popularity grew among Romans of all classes from members of the imperial family to slaves. Her fall ritual, the Isia, which ran from October 28 to November 3, became so popular in the Roman world that it was added to the rustic Roman calendar, the rural menologia, about 40 C.E. Who was this most ancient Egyptian goddess? What does Queen Isis offer?

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In the beginning was Isis, Oldest of the Old, Great Lady of Egypt, Queen of Heaven and Mistress of the House of Life, represented by the ankh, her symbol for "life." In antiquity, this goddess found faithful worshipers among people of all social rank dwelling in such far-flung lands as Egypt, Ethiopia, Greece, Italy, Spain, Germany, Britain, and the shores of the Arabian Gulf and Black Sea. The goddess Isis welcomed all and did not discriminate by gender, social class, wealth, or racial background. Isis bestowed her love on all peoples and was a goddess of redemption and forgiveness, welcoming those who had sinned equally with the sinless. Isis gave freely of love, pity, compassion, and

forgiveness, for she herself had known great sorrow. Isis, the Mother of Life, offered unconditional love.

The worship of Isis brought hope and meaning to many people, as she addressed directly the eternal questions of life and death. Queen Isis sails her sacred ship on a journey to the very borders of the world of the dead. And she returns. Thus, it is also fitting that the Isia was held in late October, a focused period of endings and closure, when the worlds of the living and dead touched and the veil between them was thin. Today we experience this dark magical time as Halloween, All Hallows' Eve, Samhain, or the Day of the Dead. In antiquity, these days of October belonged to Queen Isis.

The story of Isis is a very old one and has been retold and reshaped over thousands of years by people of many different cultures living in countries throughout the

Mediterranean world. This myth of a dying god, a grieving goddess, and a sacred birth is rooted in the natural cycle of the Nile River and the yearly ebb and flow of its life-sustaining waters. It is ultimately a story of faith, hope, and love.