

Jack of the Lantern



Did you know that before people began carving pumpkins to make Jack O' Lanterns, they used to carve other things like potatoes, turnips, and beets? It all began with an old Irish folklore about a man called Stingy Jack who played tricks on everyone. Because of his trickery, Jack's soul was doomed to roam in the darkness forever. Jack supposedly carved a turnip and placed a flame inside it to help him see as he wandered through the dark. The Irish called him Jack of the Lantern.

In Ireland and Scotland, people believed that spirits could return to the land of the living on Halloween. To keep wandering spirits like Stingy Jack from entering their homes, people made their own lanterns by carving scary faces into turnips or potatoes and placing a hot piece of coal inside to light them. They called their lanterns Jack O' Lanterns after Stingy Jack. People in England also carved their own versions of Jack O' Lanterns out of beets to keep spirits away on this night. They believed that the lanterns would light the way for the spirits to move out of their town, keeping them safe until next Halloween.

So how did this tradition evolve into carving pumpkins for Halloween? When millions of Irish people immigrated to America after the Irish potato famine, they had trouble finding potatoes and turnips. They began to use pumpkins, which were more abundant and easier to carve. Today, this Irish tradition is a large part of the American celebration of Halloween.