

# October: Popcorn Popping Month

By: Lisa Franzen-Castle, RD, PhD, Nutrition Specialist  
UNL Panhandle Research & Extension Center  
Author E-mail: lfranzen2@unl.edu

Popcorn can be a healthy snack, if made with little or no added salt and butter. It's also good for you because it counts as a whole grain. USDA's Choose



MyPlate recommends getting at least half of your grains from whole grains. Three cups of popped popcorn equal one serving from the grains

group. October is Popcorn Popping Month, a good time to check out the following tips to make popcorn fun and healthy.

## Popcorn Popping Tricks & Tips:

**Popcorn and nutrition.** Popcorn is whole grain, contains fiber, and is naturally low in fat and calories. Air-popped popcorn has only 31 calories per cup; oil-popped popcorn has only 55 calories per cup. When lightly buttered, popcorn contains about 133 calories per cup. Popcorn can be a great snack option between meals because it satisfies and doesn't spoil your appetite. Be sure to check the Nutrition Facts Label when buying pre-packaged popcorn. Do a comparison between different brands and types and pick one with lower fat, sodium, and calories.



**Popcorn at meals and as snacks.** Put popped popcorn on top of soups or salads, season plain popcorn with garlic powder, or season the popping oil with spices to create a lightly flavored savory treat. Try combining popcorn with dried fruit and nuts to create your own custom snack mix. Create easy to prepare and tasty popcorn dessert bars; tint liquid mixture for different holidays.



### Popcorn popping tips.

Not only is popcorn tasty and economical, it's also easy to prepare. Whether you choose to pop popcorn in an electric popper or on the stove, follow these tips from The Popcorn Board ([bit.ly/PHURHc](http://bit.ly/PHURHc)):

- First, warm the popper, heavy pan or skillet. If oil popping your corn, add 1/4 cup of cooking oil to the pan. Allow the oil to heat. The best popping temperature is between 400 and 460 degrees Fahrenheit. Oil burns at 500 degrees. If your oil starts to smoke, it's too hot. Any cooking oil will work provided it can retain the proper temperature.
- Don't pop popcorn in butter because it will burn.
- Test the heat of the oil by dropping in one or two kernels. When the kernel pops or spins in the oil, you're ready to add the remaining popcorn. Pour just enough kernels to cover the bottom of the pan. Shake the pan to be certain oil coats each kernel.
- Kernels that don't pop do not have sufficient water contained within the starch to create the build-up of pressure needed to pop the kernels.

Eating popcorn is a great way to increase your intake of whole grains and your daily fiber intake. Be careful when adding toppings like butter and salt

because it can turn into an unhealthy snack. Try to make popcorn with little or no added salt or butter. For more food, nutrition, and health information go to [food.unl.edu](http://food.unl.edu).





## Halloween treats made with popcorn.

**Halloween party popcorn.** Combine popcorn with your choice of the following ingredients:

- Raisins and other dried fruit, candy corn, nuts, gummy worms, and orange/black candies such as jelly beans or other small candies.

Recipe directions:

- By mixing Halloween candy with popcorn, you cut back on the total amount of candy offered. Serve with a scoop from a large bowl, or fill a self-closing sandwich bag with popcorn for individual servings.

Check out more party food ideas with popcorn such as Bony Fingers and Ghosts at:

[food.unl.edu/web/fnh/healthy-halloween-party](http://food.unl.edu/web/fnh/healthy-halloween-party)

**Mini Popcorn Balls.** Makes about 16 popcorn balls.

Ingredients needed are:

- 10 cups popped popcorn, 16 ounce package miniature marshmallows, 1/4 cup butter or margarine, 1 cup diced dried fruit, 1 cup chips (chocolate, butterscotch, etc.)

Recipe directions:

- Mix popcorn, dried fruit and chips in large bowl; set aside.
- In large saucepan, heat marshmallows and butter over low heat, stirring until melted and smooth.
- Pour marshmallow mixture over popcorn mixture; tossing to coat evenly. Cool about 5 minutes, to allow handling.
- Rinse hands with cold water. Shake off the excess water.
- Form popcorn mixture into 3-inch balls with your damp hands.

Check out additional popcorn recipes at UNL Food, Youth/4-H - Cooking with Kids:

<http://food.unl.edu/web/youth/micro-snacks>

## Additional Resources & Links:

- **MyPlate: Grains Group, G1607.** This UNL publication describes ways to include grain food products, especially whole grains, into the diet. <http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/sendIt/g1607.pdf>
- **The Popcorn Board.** Information and resources for kids and teachers, nutrition, and recipes. <http://www.popcorn.org/>.

## Sources:

1. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). 2012. Choose Food Groups: Grains. Accessed at: <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/food-groups/grains.html>.
2. The Popcorn Board. 2011. Nutrition & Recipes and Preparing Perfect Popcorn. Accessed at: <http://www.popcorn.org/>.
3. Cook it Quick On-line Newsletter. 2012. Healthy Halloween Party Foods with Popcorn. Accessed at: <http://food.unl.edu/web/fnh/healthy-halloween-party>.
4. Mayo Clinic. 2012. Nutrition and Healthy Eating: High Fiber Foods. Accessed at: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/high-fiber-foods/NU00582>.

**Updated:** September 2012

**This Newsletter has been peer reviewed**



Scan this QR Code with your smartphone or other electronic device to go directly to the [food.unl.edu](http://food.unl.edu) website.