

## STILL ROTTEN

# TOO MANY PUMPKINS

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN HALLOWEEN'S OVER?

BY CHELSEA LEU  
ILLUSTRATION BY JASON HOLLEY

**E**VERY YEAR, more than a billion (a billion!) pounds of pumpkins are grown for Halloween in the United States. And every year, when day breaks on Nov. 1, one thing is certain: All those pumpkins now suddenly seem . . . kind of sad. The jack-o'-lantern you so carefully carved is already beginning to collapse in on itself. Fall-festival sites are piled high with mushing gourds. Farmers gaze out on vast patches full of pumpkins that never even got the chance to be carved. So what happens next for all these aging orange orbs?

Lots of past-their-prime pumpkins are tossed in the trash. But besides being an undignified end, that's also not great for the environment. Luckily, there are better ways to thank the stars of the season for their service and send them off to pumpkin heaven.

**THEY ARE COMPOSTED.** Under blazing Texas heat, "pumpkins literally melt away," says Dustin Miller, who oversees the Dallas Arboretum's annual Pumpkin Village, which goes through more than 100,000 pumpkins, gourds and squash. The arboretum puts that goop to use by composting it, a process that breaks down organic matter into nutrient-rich dirt. Then it uses that soil in its gardens to grow a new generation of produce.

**THEY ARE SMASHED FOR FUN, THEN COMPOSTED.** Composting isn't just for festivals — your own moldering jack-o'-lanterns can also find a second life as soil. Lots of towns even host pumpkin-smashing events, where you can whack your squishy jack-o'-lanterns with a bat (which helps the composting process along) before throwing them on the heap.

**THEY ARE FED TO ANIMALS.** Pumpkins that haven't begun the slow march toward mush can be recycled in a different way. After Halloween, Matt Cooley, the owner of Cool Patch Pumpkins in Dixon, Calif., gives away some of his nonrotting pumpkins to local ranchers to feed to their horses, cows and goats. And the Dallas Arboretum sends its edible pumpkins to the Dallas Zoo. The gorillas love them so much that the zookeepers have to limit how many they get. Otherwise, "they'd eat them until they're sick," says Miller, who used to work there. Galápagos tortoises will form a circle around a pumpkin and take chomps out of it, "like something out of a zombie movie," says Kerri Slifka, the Zoo's curator of nutrition. Some animals even play with them. Lions and tigers claw and pounce, while hippos bob for them in their pool. "We always look forward to pumpkin time," Slifka says. ♦