



Garfield

Garfield is an American comic strip created by Jim Davis. Originally published locally as *Jon* in 1976 (later changed to *Garfield* in 1977), then in nationwide syndication from 1978, it chronicles the life of the title character Garfield the cat, Odie the dog, and their owner Jon Arbuckle. As of 2013, it was syndicated in roughly 2,580 newspapers and journals and held the Guinness World Record for being the world's most widely syndicated comic strip.^[1]

Though its setting is rarely mentioned in print, *Garfield* takes place in Jim Davis's hometown of Muncie, Indiana, according to the television special *Happy Birthday, Garfield*. Common themes in the strip include Garfield's laziness, obsessive eating, love of coffee and lasagna, disdain of Mondays, and dieting. Garfield is also shown to manipulate people to get whatever he wants. The strip's focus is mostly on the interactions among Garfield, Jon, and Odie, but other recurring characters appear as well.

Garfield has been adapted into various other forms of media. Several half-hour television specials aired on CBS between 1982 and 1991, starting with *Here Comes Garfield* and ending with *Garfield Gets a Life*. Also airing on CBS from 1988 to 1994 was the animated series *Garfield and Friends*, which also adapted Davis's other comic strip *U.S. Acres*. All of these featured Lorenzo Music as the voice of Garfield. The feature film *Garfield: The Movie* was released in 2004 and *Garfield: A Tail of Two Kitties* two years later. Both were live-action movies featuring a computer-animated Garfield voiced by Bill Murray. Another animated adaptation for television, *The Garfield Show*, aired on France 3 in France and Cartoon Network in the United States from 2009 to 2016. In addition, Garfield has been the subject of merchandise, video games, books, and other spin-off merchandise. The strip has also been re-published in compilations; the first of these, *Garfield at Large* (1980), developed what came to be known as the "Garfield format" for re-publication of newspaper comics in book form.

On August 6, 2019, before its merger with CBS Corporation to become ViacomCBS (now Paramount Global), New York City-based Viacom announced that it would acquire Paws, Inc., including most rights to the *Garfield* franchise (the comics, merchandise and animated cartoons). The deal did not include the rights to the live-action *Garfield* films,^[2] which are still owned by The Walt Disney Company through its 20th Century Studios label, as well as *The Garfield Movie* which was released by Sony Pictures under its Columbia Pictures label in 2024.^[3] Jim Davis continues to make comics, and a new Garfield animated series is in production for Paramount Global subsidiary Nickelodeon.^[4]

History

Cartoonist Jim Davis was born and raised in Muncie, Indiana. In 1973, while working as an assistant for T.K. Ryan's *Tumbleweeds*, he created the comic strip *Gnorm Gnat*, which ran only in the *Pendleton Times* of Pendleton, Indiana, from 1973 to 1975 and met with little success. Davis had tried to syndicate the strip,

Garfield



Center: Garfield (clockwise from bottom-left: Nermal, Odie, Arlene, and Pooky)

Author(s)	<u>Jim Davis</u>
Owner	<u>Paws, Inc.</u> (<u>Viacom</u>) (2019–2022) (<u>Paramount Global</u>) (since 2022)
Website	<u>www.nick.com/garfield</u> (<u>http s://www.nick.com/garfield</u>) <u>www.gocomics.com/garfield</u> (<u>https://www.gocomics.com/garfield</u>)
Current status/schedule	Running/daily
Launch date	June 19, 1978
Syndicate(s)	<u>Universal Press Syndicate</u> / <u>Universal Uclick</u> / <u>Andrews McMeel Syndication</u> (1994–present) <u>United Feature Syndicate</u> (1978–1994)
Publisher(s)	<u>Random House</u> (under <u>Ballantine Books</u>), occasionally <u>Andrews McMeel Publishing</u>
Genre(s)	<u>Gag-a-day Humor</u>
Preceded by	<i>Jon</i> (1976–1977) and <i>Garfield</i> (1977–1978), locally published strips in the <i>Pendleton Times-Post</i>

but was unsuccessful; he noted that one editor told him that his "art was good, his gags were great, [but] nobody can identify with bugs."^[5] Davis decided to peruse current comic strips to determine what species of animal characters might be more popular. He felt that dogs were doing well, but noticed no prominent cats. Davis figured he could create a cat star, having grown up on a farm with twenty-five cats. Thus was created the character of Garfield.^[5]

The title character Garfield was based on the cats Davis grew up around; he took his name and personality from Davis' grandfather, James A. Garfield Davis, whom he described as "a large, cantankerous man."^[6] Garfield's human owner Jon Arbuckle derived his name from a 1950s coffee commercial. Jon's roommate Lyman, added to give Jon someone to talk with, carried on the name of an earlier *Gnorm Gnat* character.^[5] The final character was Lyman's dog Spot, who was renamed Odie so as to avoid confusion with a dog also named Spot in the comic strip *Boner's Ark*. From 1976 to early 1978, these characters appeared in a strip called *Jon* which also ran in the *Times*. In 1977, the strip's name was changed to *Garfield*. The *Jon* comic strip was largely unknown until 2019, when YouTuber Quinton Hoover found several digital scans of the *Jon* publications from the Pendleton Community Library and Indiana State Library.^[7] *Jon* first appeared in the *Pendleton Times* on January 8, 1976, just two weeks after *Gnorm Gnat* ended.

In March 1978, United Feature Syndicate accepted the strip for national distribution (which had been retitled *Garfield* on September 1, 1977), and the last *Pendleton Times* strip ran on March 2, 1978. United Feature Syndicate debuted the first strip nationwide in 41 newspapers, starting on June 19, 1978. After a test run, the *Chicago Sun-Times* dropped the *Garfield* strip, only to reinstate it after readers' complaints.^{[1][8]}

The strip underwent stylistic changes, evolving from the style of the 1976–83 strips, to a more cartoonish look from 1984 onward. This change has mainly affected Garfield's design, which underwent a "Darwinian evolution" in which he began walking on his hind legs, "slimmed down", and "stopped looking ... through squinty little eyes" His evolution, according to Davis, was to make it easier to "push Odie off the table" or "reach for a piece of pie".^[9] The redesign was in part on the advice of Davis's mentor and erstwhile rival Charles M. Schulz; though Schulz privately expressed some jealousy at *Garfield* overtaking his own strip *Peanuts* and thought Davis's characters were lacking in subtlety and nuance, he provided substantial advice to Davis over the years, particularly in setting the franchising and merchandising blueprint Schulz had built for Snoopy, which Davis adopted to great success for *Garfield*.^[10]

Garfield quickly became a commercial success. By the beginning of 1981, less than three years after its nationwide launch, the strip was in 850 newspapers and had sold over \$15 million in merchandise. To manage the merchandise, Davis founded Paws, Inc.^[8] In 1982 the strip was appearing in more than 1,000 newspapers.^[11]

By 2002, *Garfield* became the world's most syndicated strip, appearing in 2,570 newspapers with 263 million readers worldwide;^[1] by 2004, *Garfield* appeared in nearly 2,600 newspapers and sold from \$750 million to \$1 billion worth of merchandise in 111 countries.^[12] In 1994, Davis's company, Paws, Inc., purchased all rights to the strips from 1978 to 1993 from United Feature.

While retaining creative control and being the only signer, Davis now only writes and usually does the rough sketches. Since the late 1990s most of the work has been done by long-time assistants Brett Koth and Gary Barker. Inking and coloring work is done by other artists, while Davis spends most of the time supervising production and merchandising the characters.^[12]



Cartoonist Jim Davis is the creator of *Garfield*



The first *Jon* strip, which ran in the *Pendleton Times* on January 8, 1976



The appearance of the characters gradually changed over time;^[9] the left panel is from the March 7, 1980, strip; the right is from the July 6, 1990, strip

Content

The strip's title character is Garfield, an obese orange tabby cat. Garfield's personality is defined by his sarcasm, laziness, and gluttony, with the character showing a particular affinity for lasagna. His owner is Jon Arbuckle, a man with an affinity for stereotypically nerdy pastimes. Jon's other pet is Odie, a dim-witted yellow dog. Most strips center around interactions among the three characters' conflicting personalities. Regular themes include Jon's frustration with Garfield's antics; Garfield's disdain for Odie; and Jon's interactions with his girlfriend and the pets' veterinarian, Dr. Liz Wilson. Many strips feature Jon, Garfield, and Odie visiting Jon's unnamed parents and brother Doc Boy on their family farm. Other side characters include various mice and spiders within the house, both frequent targets of abuse and scorn from Garfield; Garfield's teddy bear Pooky; Garfield's girlfriend Arlene, a pink cat; Nermal, a gray striped kitten who enjoys tormenting Garfield over his perceived age; and various other pets who live in the neighborhood.

Part of the strip's broad pop cultural appeal is due to its lack of social or political commentary; though this was Davis's original intention, he also admitted that his "grasp of politics isn't strong", joking that, for many years, he thought "OPEC was a denture adhesive".^{[13][14]}

Originally created with the intentions to "come up with a good, marketable character",^[15] *Garfield* has spawned merchandise earning \$750 million to \$1 billion annually. In addition to the various merchandise and commercial tie-ins, the strip has spawned several animated television specials, two animated television series, two theatrical feature-length live-action/CGI animated films, and three fully CGI animated direct-to-video films.

Marketing

Garfield was originally created by Davis with the intention to come up with a "good, marketable character".^[15] Now the world's most syndicated comic strip,^[16] *Garfield* has spawned a "profusion"^[12] of merchandise including clothing, toys, games, books, Caribbean cruises, credit cards, dolls,^[17] DVDs of the movies or the TV series,^[18] and related media.^[19] In April 2024, Motel 6 announced Garfield as their first "Chief Pet Officer" and Garfield-themed rooms for the release of *The Garfield Movie*.^[20]

Media

Books

Starting in 1980, the comic strip has been collected in anthologies. The first, *Garfield at Large*, was published in March 1980 by Ballantine Books. These books helped increase the strip's popularity through sales, leading to several of them reaching the top of the *New York Times* best sellers list.^[21] For these compilation books, Davis devised a book layout which is considerably longer and less tall than the average book. This allowed the strip to be oriented in the same format as it appeared in the newspaper, as opposed to earlier comic strip anthologies which often stacked the panels vertically.^[21] This book style has since been referred to in the publishing industry as the "Garfield format" and has been adapted by other publishers. Davis noted that it became popular for other comic strip anthologies in particular, such as those of *The Far Side*.^[22]



Garfield graffiti in Berlin (Germany)

Internet

Garfield.com was the strip's official website, which contained archives of past strips along with games and an online store. Jim Davis had also collaborated with Ball State University and Pearson Digital Learning to create ProfessorGarfield.org, an educational website with interactive games focusing on math and reading skills, and with Children's Technology Group to create MindWalker, a web browser that allows parents to limit the websites their children can view to a preset list.^{[23][24][25]}

A variety of edited *Garfield* strips have been made available on the Internet, with some being hosted on their own unofficial, dedicated sites. Dating from 2005, a site titled the "Garfield Randomizer" created a three-panel strip using panels from previous *Garfield* strips.^[26] Another approach, known as "Silent Garfield",^[27] involved removing Garfield's thought balloons from the strips.^[28] Some examples date from 2006.^[29] A webcomic called *Arbuckle* does the above but also