

LEVELED Book • O



Written by Gabrielle Fimbres

Giant Pumpkins



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Table of Contents

Giant Pumpkins	4
World's Biggest Pumpkin	5
Growing a Winner	7
There Can Be Only One!	10
Pumpkin Boats	12
Gigantic Jack-o'-Lanterns	13
Giant Pumpkin Pie!	14
Glossary	16



Tim Mathison stands next to one of the giant pumpkins he grew.

Giant Pumpkins

Have you ever seen a giant **pumpkin**—one so big it would not fit in a car?

People all over the world have taken up the **hobby** of growing giant pumpkins. Growers **compete** against one another, hoping to break the **record** for the world's biggest pumpkin. In 2013, Tim Mathison from Napa, California, won the title with a pumpkin that **weighed** 2,032 pounds (922 kg). That's how much a walrus or a small car weighs! The gigantic squash measured more than 17 feet (5.2 m) around.

World's Biggest Pumpkin

Tim grew three giant pumpkins over six months in 2013. His pumpkins set world records for the first-, third-, and fourth-largest pumpkins ever grown.

At fifty-seven years old, Tim has won more than \$50,000 in prizes for his pumpkins. He showed his record-breaking pumpkin to the world on a national television show.

Tim's daughter, Tara, cannot walk or talk because of a rare medical problem. Tara joined her dad in the pumpkin patch every evening.

"She is my inspiration," Tim said. "I took her out to the patch every night for two hours, and she'd be smiling."



Tara Mathison spends lots of time watching her dad work in the pumpkin patch.



Using the best seeds is an important part of growing giant pumpkins.

Tim started growing giant pumpkins seven years ago. They have gotten bigger every year. He said using the best seeds, soil, and plant food is his secret.

He is now sharing the seeds from his prize-winning pumpkins with growers all over the world.

He hopes kids will grow their own giant pumpkins. “It’s amazing to watch the pumpkins grow. Some days they put on 53 pounds (24 kg). It’s a lot of fun.”

Growing a Winner

According to Tim, anyone can grow giant pumpkins if they understand what pumpkins need.

Pumpkin growers make sure their soil is rich with **nutrients**. They use **compost** and other organic matter in the soil. Rich soil helps pumpkins grow quickly.

Growers use seeds that are known to produce giant pumpkins. They plant them indoors in the spring, often in April. The plants can be hurt by cold or heat, so they must be protected.



Tim's work on his pumpkin patch starts with preparing the soil.



The frame of Tim's greenhouse remained in place after he removed the plastic cover that protected the prize pumpkin.

Tim used heaters to give his pumpkins a "head start" in the spring of 2013. Once it was warmer, the plants were moved to a sunny spot in the garden and carefully watered and fertilized.

Growers **prune** the plants—or cut away extra vines—at least every other day. When flowers appear, they are **pollinated**, and the pumpkins start to grow.

The best pumpkins grow on strong, healthy vines. Growers are careful not to use too much plant food. Pumpkins can grow too big and burst.



Cutting extra pumpkins off the vine directs all the plant's growth to the ones that remain.

When they are the size of softballs, all but the best pumpkins are cut off the vine. As a result, the plant food reaches the most perfect pumpkins.

Tim spent two hours every morning working in his pumpkin patch. After he came home from work, he spent two more hours in the garden every evening. He fertilized, pruned, and cared for his four pumpkin plants all summer and into the fall.



Giant pumpkins await weighing at PumpkinFest in Cooperstown, New York.

There Can Be Only One!

In October, growers with the biggest pumpkins meet at weigh-offs around the world. It is an exciting time as growers wait to see who has the biggest pumpkin. For winners, the long months of planning, planting, pruning, watering, and care pay off. Their giant pumpkins are some of the biggest in the world!



Moving giant pumpkins around isn't easy, even when using forklifts.

Growers use forklifts and trucks to transport their pumpkins to weigh-offs. They carefully use ropes, straps, and chains to move their pumpkins. At weigh-offs, pumpkins are weighed on giant scales to see which is biggest. After the contests are over, growers have creative—and delicious—ways of using their pumpkins.



Dmitri Galitzine celebrates after setting a world record in 2013 as the fastest person ever to paddle 100 meters in a pumpkin boat.

Pumpkin Boats

Some growers in countries around the world hollow out their giant pumpkins and turn them into boats. People use paddles to race the boats. Sometimes they wear costumes during the races.

A man in the United Kingdom set a new speed world record in 2013. He paddled a hollowed-out giant pumpkin 100 meters—about the length of a football field—in two minutes.



Artist Russ Leno of Seattle carves a giant pumpkin that will be sold to raise money for a charity.

Gigantic Jack-o'-Lanterns

Giant pumpkins can be carved into silly or scary jack-o'-lanterns. Some carvers use power tools to create works of art.

Wowser!

The recipe for the giant pumpkin pie called for 2,796 eggs, 525 pounds (238 kg) of sugar, 7 pounds (3.1 kg) of salt, and 14.5 pounds (6.6 kg) of cinnamon.



Ringmaster Vernon Bergman reveals the weight of the pumpkin pie that set the world record in 2010.

Giant Pumpkin Pie!

Some giant pumpkins are used to make huge pies. Growers of giant pumpkins in Ohio baked a pie that was named the world's largest in 2010. It was 20 feet (6.1 m) wide and weighed 3,699 pounds (1,678 kg). That's a lot of pumpkin pie!



A girl stands on a pumpkin in her grandfather's patch.

Growing giant pumpkins can be a fun way to spend time in the garden. Maybe someday you will grow the world's biggest pumpkin in your backyard!

Glossary

compete (v.)	to do something for the purpose of winning (p. 4)
compost (n.)	a mixture of rotting plants, manure, and other materials that is added to soil to make it better (p. 7)
hobby (n.)	an activity done for fun and relaxation (p. 4)
nutrients (n.)	substances that living things need to live, stay healthy, and grow (p. 7)
pollinated (v.)	put pollen in a flower in order to fertilize it (p. 8)
prune (v.)	to cut off some branches or vines of a plant to direct its growth (p. 8)
pumpkin (n.)	a large orange fruit with thick flesh (p. 4)
record (n.)	a measurement of an event or achievement that has never been exceeded (p. 4)
weighed (v.)	measured how heavy someone or something was by using a scale (p. 4)

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Front cover: Twin brothers Ian and Stuart Paton pose with a pumpkin they grew in 2013 that weighed over 1,100 pounds (499 kg). The brothers set a national record in Britain with a pumpkin they grew in 2012 that weighed more than 1,300 pounds (590 kg).

Back cover: Howard Dill's pumpkin patch in Nova Scotia, Canada, is a source of boats for a local pumpkin boat race.

Title page: Contestants race pumpkin boats in the Giant Pumpkin Regatta at PumpkinFest 2007 in Cooperstown, New York.

Page 3: Central Park visitors pose with a giant pumpkin in New York City.

Giant Pumpkins
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