

By Kylee Baumle

Halloween is now behind us, but Thanksgiving looms large and so do the pumpkins. Everywhere you look, you see the orange orbs, on front porches, in the groceries, and some are still sitting in the pumpkin patch.

But, not all are carved as Jack-o-Lanterns. Not all will end up on your plate in a few weeks. (Mmm...pie!) Some are grown just for the sheer joy and competition of growing them. I'm talking about the quest for the largest pumpkin ever grown.

This is serious business among those who grow the giants. There are seeds called 'Dill's Atlantic Giant', 'Silver Bullet,' and some are a number indicating size (in pounds) coupled with the name of the grower. For example, 1725 Harp seeds are seeds from a pumpkin that Christy Harp of Massillon, Ohio, grew to a record 1,725 pounds to win the competition in 2009.

Pumpkins weighing in with numbers like 1,500 or more pounds aren't your nice, round, vibrant orange pumpkins. When one gets to be that size, gravity does a number on it and it starts looking like a tired Sumo wrestler. But, competitive pumpkin growing isn't about appearances. It isn't even about linear size. It's all about weight.

Competitive growers work most of the year on some aspect of their obsession (and that's what it is), whether it be in amending the soil, researching seeds, or tending early-started seedlings. There are pumpkin clubs and they meet regularly to discuss this pumpkin-growing business. But, for all the rivalry that exists among the growers, they help each other, too. Everyone wants to see the pumpkins grow even larger, so knowledge is shared.

Competitions are held in Oct. and the weighing process isn't easy. One of the biggest challenges is transporting the large pumpkins to a weighing station. When a pumpkin is that large, there's always a danger of breaking it open, in which case, the pumpkin would be disqualified. Even having a crack would eliminate a pumpkin from competition. So, moving

these big boys can be a tedious process.

This year's winner was grown by Tim and Susan Mathison from California and weighed in at a whopping 2,032 pounds. That set a new world record, beating the previous one set just last year by a grower from Rhode Island, which weighed 2,009 pounds. Each year's winner is then taken to the New York Botanical Garden where it is on display for a few weeks.

Even if you don't want to get into growing the world's largest pumpkin, growing big ones can be fun to do. Just get some giant seeds, 'Dill's Atlantic Giant' are readily available, and see what happens. One tip, pumpkins are heavy feeders so don't forget to use plenty of compost and fertilizer.

Who knows, maybe The Great Pumpkin will rise from your pumpkin patch next Halloween.

Read more at Kylee's blog, Our Little Acre, at "www.ourlittleacre.com and on Facebook <http://www.facebook.com/OurLittleAcre> Or email her at PauldingProgressGardener@gmail.com.