

Bell County Master Gardeners'
Tip of the Week
By Candy Mullen
"Massive Pumpkins!"

It is pumpkin time again here in Central Texas so you have probably noticed the local pumpkin patches and the various activities that go with them. That got me to thinking about the largest pumpkin ever and doing some research. I just typed in the words "world's largest pumpkin" in Google and was amazed at the information I found.

This year the record was set for the world's largest pumpkin at 2009 lbs by a pumpkin named Freak II grown by a Rhode Island farmer which earned him \$5500 for the largest and an additional \$10,000 for the first person to grow a pumpkin over *ONE TON!* I was amazed at the size and the record. Evidently pumpkin growing contests by weight really started at the Topsfield World Fair in 1984 with the first record holder weighing in at 433 lbs. Now weighing contests are held across the country at various fairs through out the fall and records are kept and compared. They use special slings, forklifts, and scales to weigh the enormous pumpkins and the more than a ton mark has been elusive until this year.

The largest pumpkin is certified and then usually is sent to the New York Botanical gardens with other large pumpkins. They are then carved by renowned artists into something spectacular and put on display for the season. The photos are found on the web using largest pumpkin and are simply amazing, the latest being "Zombie Horror Scene!"

Did you also know they carve out large pumpkins and have boat races with them like canoe races? And equally interesting are the pumpkin cannons and competitions held for shooting pumpkins the farthest with elaborate machines built specifically for that purpose! But just imagine a pumpkin pie 20 feet in diameter and weighing in at 3699 lbs, which is currently the world's record for a pumpkin pie.

Growing pumpkins here in Central Texas is fairly easy. Pumpkins are from the species *cucurbita* often abbreviated as *c.* The giant pumpkins are from *c. maxima* categories. They are warm season vine or bush crops and seeds can be planted after all danger from frost in May through July here. They do need room, about 50 -100 square feet per hill, which gives the vines room to ramble. They like heat but will need water during our hot summers into the fall. There are bush varieties if your space is limited. Pumpkins are American native plants and versatile crops and have many food uses with great vitamins. Enjoy this wonderful fruit while it is in season.

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com