

Home/Garden

Pumpkin contest ends up a huge success

In spite of the cold, sleet and rain that dimmed the jeweled hillsides to subtle shades of pumpkin and gold, cars slid through the mud two Sundays ago and pulled into Mother Earth Produce on the Trail for the weighing in of the largest pumpkins grown in three Shelburnes this year: Shelburnes in Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Nova Scotia were vying for the great pumpkin championship.

A total of 18 pumpkins were brought in for the contest, the smallest a perfectly shaped, 25 pounder.

The pale apricot surface of one pumpkin was marred by a cracking. "Obviously, the owner of this pumpkin was out whipping it on to heftier growth," shouted one bystander. "Faster, faster, grow faster!"

It was to no avail. It wasn't even a contender.

Adam Mitchell, aged 8-1/2, watched solemnly while his entry weighed in at 176 pounds, clearly the winner of the youth division. He said there was no secret. He just planted his seeds and this vine had four big pumpkins. When pressed, he did concede that he had fertilized his plant with dried cow manure.

In the adult division, two pumpkins tied, both weighing in at 207 pounds. While everyone held their breath, the big scale was washed of all the mud that had accumulated. Then the pumpkins were washed —

Pat
Leuchtman



Between
The Rows

and dried, as well as possible.

After more grunting to hoist each pumpkin separately onto the scale, the judges declared Sally Weatherbee the winner because her giant pumpkin was just a hair over 207 pounds, less than 4 ounces more than the other. A close race.

Sally said that if she told the secret of growing mammoth pumpkins it wouldn't be a secret any more, but she did allow that she treated her pumpkin to a lot of love while it was growing. As a reward, it won't end up in pie; Sally plans to use it for a jack o'lantern for the kids at her family child care center.

After we had exclaimed over the winners, Janet Iwanowicz, owner of Mother Earth, made a conference call to the New Hampshire and Nova Scotia Shelburnes. The callers from New Hampshire cried, their adult entry weighed only 44 pounds and their youth entry, a mere 50 pounds.

Jim Spencer of Nova Scotia, founder of the International Shel-

burne Pumpkin Contest, had better news. The adult entry weighed 133 pounds, but the youth entry tipped the scales at 243 pounds, clearly the International winner.

Even though the winners were closemouthed about their champion gardening techniques, other experts have been more forthcoming about their advice.

If you want a giant pumpkin, you have to start with a giant variety. Burpee recommends their Big Max which often weighs over 100 pounds for pies and giant pumpkin contests. Parks Seeds gives assurance that Big Moon often reaches weights over 200 pounds.

Stokes and Harris offer Atlantic Giant seeds. A 493 pound Atlantic Giant pumpkin held the world's record for four years.

Pumpkins are heavy feeders. Plant your seeds in a hill that has been enriched with at least two or three shovelful of rich compost and rotted manure. A mid-season dressing of compost and rotted manure will also help your plant along. Keep the vines well watered during the growing season.

At the weigh-in, one experienced gardener told me that pumpkins will put out additional roots along the vine if they are encouraged by burying a section of vine with soil. It's also important to protect it from the wind so the vine doesn't shift around

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These extra roots will help get more nourishment to the ripening pumpkins.

Later in the season, pick off all small pumpkins that will not mature before frost. If you are really interested in raising a giant pumpkin, you can remove all but two or three pumpkins earlier, forcing all the strength of the plant into those few fruits. Also pinch off the growing end of the vine, again to concentrate the power of the plant. This is a method that is used with growing other vegetables and flowers for competition.

Maybe next year other Shelburnes will join this friendly International Competition. There are records to be made.



Recorder/Eucia Rossom