

# Valley of Giants

## Meet the Growers Taming Monster-Sized Pumpkins



Amongst the normally modest and unassuming vegetable garden, giant pumpkins are the behemoths that reign supreme as the titans of the patch. Pumpkins so enormous they could serve as the carriage in a fairy tale or serve as homes for ghouls and goblins enchant event goers across the world. Each fall, these gargantuan gourds make their debut at The Great Westerville Pumpkin Glow to be carved by artists from across the country. But where do these dazzling giants grow and how do they make it to ‘the Glow’?

The answer lies with Enon Valley, PA growers Dave and Carol Stelts. Dave has been growing monster pumpkins for over 35 years, starting at an early age as his father’s right hand in the garden and at monster pumpkin competitions. He never lost the growing “bug.” In addition to growing pumpkins, Dave, Carol along with their partner, Michael Dongilli, started the Pittsburgh Monster Pumpkin Festival seven years ago and began delivering giant pumpkins to the Glow in 2022.

We asked Dave a few questions about the colossal gourds:

### **These giant pumpkins don't grow from your average grocery store or garden center seed! What types of pumpkins grow to these monstrous sizes?**

There is only one—the Atlantic Giant, an heirloom pumpkin propagated, developed and introduced by Howard Dill, “the Pumpkin King,” in 1978. We hand pollinate all of our plants and keep detailed records of their genealogy. Some seeds have sold for well over \$1,000.

### **How long does it take to grow a pumpkin of this size?**

We start the seeds in early April and harvest in September and October. The pumpkins put on 80% of their weight in about 60 days.

### **Can you offer insight into the world of competitive pumpkin growing?**

We compete in the Great Pumpkin Commonwealth (GPC), a worldwide organization that is the NFL and NBA of giant pumpkin growing. We have competed in as many as 7 GPC-sanctioned weigh-offs in a year. We are currently in a tie with two brothers from the United Kingdom, with 13 pumpkins weighing over 2,000 pounds in competition.

### How many awards have you won?

We set the world record in 2000 for a pumpkin that weighed 1,140 pounds. We have placed in the top 10 of the Grower of the Year competition all but three times. First place is decided by the cumulative weight of your top three officially entered pumpkins. We've won top prizes at 31 sites, but have yet to win the Grower of the Year competition. It is our "holy grail." Hopefully someday.

### What is the largest pumpkin you have ever grown?

2,376 pounds.

### What is your most rewarding experience in growing and showing monster pumpkins?

I served as the president of the GPC for years. In that time we grew from 22 competition sites in the western hemisphere to 105 sites around the globe, transforming into an all-inclusive worldwide competition.

*Right - Dave and Carol Stelts of Dave and Carol's Valley of the Giants pose with their monster pumpkins for a competition.*



## GIANT PUMPKINS: BY THE NUMBERS



William Warnock was the first person to grow a world record pumpkin, setting a world record of 400 pounds at the Paris World's Fair.



Monster pumpkins can add as much as 33 pounds of weight per day, growing as the only fruit on the vine.



Each colossal gourd can contain around 800 seeds and enough flesh to make over 600 pumpkin pies.



The current world record for the heaviest pumpkin was grown by Travis Gienger and weighed in at 2,749 pounds at a weigh-off in Half Moon Bay, Calif.



Participants in Windsor, Canada take pumpkin carving to a new level by turning giant pumpkins into boats in an annual pumpkin regatta!