



Necessity is the Mother of Pumpkin Trials

by

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Budget cuts are something that many of us are learning to live with these days. When we realized that with our student workers reduced by 75% (4 to 1) and our permanent staff reduced by 37%, we knew we could no longer continue our flower and vegetable trials. Rather than let all of that productive land lay fallow, we decided to try to induce some of our volunteers to adopt various flower and vegetable beds. One of the volunteers that stepped forward was long time Fairbanks Master Gardener, Linda Schandelmeier, ably assisted by her husband John Davies.

Linda and John planted a pumpkin patch that included a pie pumpkin: ‘Small Sugar’, carving pumpkins: ‘Appalachian’, ‘Hijinks’, ‘Neon’ and ‘Rock Star’; and the giant fair pumpkin, ‘Big Max’. The ‘Big Max’ is actually not a true pumpkin, but instead a type of squash. The pumpkins were all started in the greenhouse on May 4 and transplanted into the field, after they had been hardened off, on June 1. The pumpkin patch was fertilized with 3lbs/100 sq. ft. 10-20-20 and rototilled before planting. Pumpkins were grown through IRT-100 plastic mulch (to warm the soil and prevent weeds) in rows spaced 7 feet apart. Within rows, ‘Small Sugar’ was spaced 3 - 3.5 feet apart, ‘Neon’ 1.5 feet apart, ‘Hijinks’ 3 feet apart, ‘Big Max’ 4 - 8 feet apart, and ‘Appalachian’ and ‘Rock Star’ 8 feet apart.

By mid July the vines had covered the patch eliminating any need for weeding between the rows and the pumpkins were harvested on 29 August. Many of the pumpkins except ‘Neon’ that had only green shoulders, were harvested green but almost all of them were mature enough to turn into orange pumpkins (stored at room temperature) by mid September. Although this plot was not designed as a statistically valid trial, we can certainly say that ‘Neon’ lived up to its reputation as being among the earliest pumpkins to ripen and ‘Big Max’ was a big bust in our climate. It produced only three small immature fruit (Table 1).

Table 1. 2012 Pumpkin Yield.

Cultivar	Total lb (kg)	Yield per hill lb (kg)	Average fruit weight lb (kg)
Appalachian (1hill)	127.6 (57.9)	127.60 (57.9)	21.27 (9.65)
Rock Star (1 hill)	71.5 (32.4)	71.50 (32.40)	14.30 (6.48)
Hi Jinks (2 hills)	128.2 (58.2)	64.10 (29.10)	6.75 (3.06)
Small Sugar (4 hills)	156.5 (71.0)	39.13 (17.75)	4.12 (1.87)
Neon (2 hills)	67.5 (30.6)	33.75 (15.30)	11.25 (5.10)
Big Max (3 hills)	15.4 (7.0)	5.13 (2.33)	5.13 (2.33)

The cultivar Appalachian produced the highest yield per plant and the largest pumpkins. It fit the catalog description (Table 2) quite well. The cultivar, Rock Star was second in yield although the individual fruits were smaller than advertised. Small Sugar produced an abundance of fruit and received high praise for its flavor by our head pumpkin grower, Linda. Interior gardeners probably can’t go wrong choosing it for a pie pumpkin since it has been a consistently high performer in our trials.

Table 2. Catalog descriptions of Cultivars

<i>Small Sugar</i> (Source: Territorial Seed Company)
<i>Cucurbita pepo</i> matures in 110 days. An heirloom, Small Sugar pumpkins have very smooth textured, bright orange flesh and the finest flavor for making pies. Vines develop 4-6 round, orange, slightly ribbed, 7 inch diameter fruits.
<i>Hijinks</i> (Source: Park Seed)
Advertised as 100 days from direct-sowing. A multipurpose pumpkin for decorating, carving, and painting, It won 2011 All America Selection honors and has uniform, 6-7 lb (7 1/2 inch) fruits. Resistant to powdery mildew.
<i>Appalachian Hybrid</i> (Source: Vermont Bean Seed Company)
Great Jack-o-lantern pumpkin for carving and painting. Produces abundant 18-25 lb fruits with deep orange skin and flesh. This cultivar has smooth ribbed skin and strong handles.
<i>Big Max</i> (Source: W. Atlee Burpee & Co.)
Huge pumpkins up to 70 in. around often weigh 100 lbs. Fruit has bright orange skin and yellow-orange flesh. Advertised as 120 days from direct sowing.
<i>Neon F1</i> (Source: Harris Seeds)
Advertised as the quickest to ripen, 90 days from sowing. It has 7-8 lb. fruit with a vivid, almost fluorescent orange color. These small Jack O'Lanterns have a medium rib and a thick black handle. The semi-bush habit of Neon allows for higher plant populations, resulting in higher yields per acre than full-size vine types.
<i>Rock Star</i> (Source: Johnny's Selected Seeds)
Advertised average weight is 25 lb per fruit that are blocky, upright and with dark orange color. Fruits have dark green handles and yield only 1-2 fruits per plant.

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