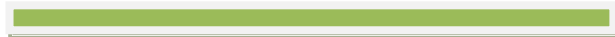




Guide to running a giant pumpkin competition

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Contents

Introduction	2
Why should you have a giant pumpkin event?	3
Timing of your event	4
Seeds	5
Competition Categories	9
Making Money	11
Other attractions.....	12
Registration	14
Sample Registration Form.....	15
Weighing your pumpkins	16
Prizes	19
Event Checklist	20
End of the event.....	21

Introduction

Hi there and thanks for downloading this free guide to setting up your very own giant pumpkin competition.

Giant Pumpkin growing has been getting more and more popular every year with more people taking up the challenge of growing and seeing what they can achieve. With this increase in interest come new competitions around the country.

Over the years I get asked all sorts of questions in relation to giant pumpkins and I have been getting a lot more enquires regarding events so I have put together this free guide for anyone out there wanting to create or help with a giant pumpkin weigh off, having been involved with The Great Pumpkin Carnival here in Hamilton over the last 4 years I have picked up a bunch of information that can help you with your event.

Some of the things mentioned in this guide might seem like they are only for really big events, but every event had to start somewhere and if it is a success and it grows then the items contained within this document will be of help.

If you know of someone that would benefit from seeing this document then please do share it, also if there is something you would like to know more about or would like to comment on something please do feel free to get in touch:

contact@giantpumpkins.co.nz

Thanks for downloading your copy and I know your event will be a great success.

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Why should you have a giant pumpkin event?

Sometimes having an event just because you can and want it is good enough reason as any to do it. But what are the outcomes of the event? What do you want to achieve?

Some events are run as a fun thing amongst a group of friends to see who can grow the biggest pumpkin there is, for others it is to draw people in to see more of the location, raise awareness of a group or raise funds for a charity.

You can actually incorporate all of those reasons into one event if you want.

Later on in the guide I will talk about different ways you can approach your pumpkin event with information and ideas to help make your event a successful one.



Timing of your event

So you have either decided to run a giant pumpkin competition yourself or you have been thrown in the deep end and have been told to organise something as you are part of a group or PTA.

The first thing you need to think about is when you are going to have this weigh-in/competition. And I can't stress enough how important this is to the whole event.

What makes a giant pumpkin weigh-in/competition a little bit different to say a fashion show is that you have to take into consideration that the main reason for the event is that people have grown a giant vegetable.

With that in mind it is good to know how long it takes to grow a giant pumpkin. The answer to that is on average 140-160 days. It is also good to know that our season here in New Zealand is backwards to the growers in the United States. We plant at the end of October at Labour weekend and the pumpkins are ready around the end of March making the late part of March and the early part of April the ideal time to have your event.

Now it is time to have a think about the actual date itself. As your event will be in March or April make sure to consider:

- ⇒ School Holidays
- ⇒ Public holidays, Easter and ANZAC Day
- ⇒ What other events are on around this time in your area.

If you know a lot of people go away during school holidays or on the public holidays they may not want to hang around for a pumpkin competition, **but** if a huge influx of visitors come into your area over this time it may work having your competition during this period. Only you can decide on what will be best for you.

Advertising your event will play a big part in people knowing when it is on where about it is and what they can expect, so really getting all the fine details sorted early on will really help.

Deciding if the event is open to the public and anyone can enter, or if it is just for a group of people within a workplace or community can also impact on the timing. If it is a smaller group of people maybe an event during the week in the late afternoon or evening will work for you, have a talk with everyone involved and see what would work best for them.



Working out the best date is important

Seeds

When planning your event you could have everything planned out to the last detail all without offering anyone any seeds in the hope that they would turn up with a pumpkin of some sort, this strategy might work for the bigger more established competitions/weigh offs out there but in my experience this isn't the best option and I'll tell you why.

First off you are missing out on an opportunity to make some money and I'll cover that in more detail later on **page 11** of this guide.

You are also not helping people out and giving them more incentive to try and grow something to then come to your event, not everyone knows that you need a certain type of seed for a giant pumpkin.

Tying these two points together above will provide a better chance for a good turnout to your event and make people try harder at growing a giant pumpkin.



Giant Pumpkin Seeds

What type of seed do you need?

So if you are going down the path of having some seeds available for competitors of your event you better make sure you get the right ones. The seed you need to get your hands on are called **Atlantic Giant**, these are the seeds used all around the world by all the top growers and they will give you the best chance of growing a giant.

For your very first event the best place to source these seeds from are Kings Seeds (www.kingsseeds.co.nz), ask for their bulk rate which is done on weight and they will be able to tell you how many you will need to buy to get the amount of seeds you require.

A key point to remember about giant pumpkin seeds is that some of them just won't grow while others will rot out while germinating, so if you have a particular number of seeds you need to get for people it will pay to get more just to have as a backup.



Seeds

VS



Seedlings

This leads nicely into my next point and that it is a lot better to actually give/sell people a seedling instead of just a seed and the reasons for this are:

- ⇒ People don't fully understand how tough seeds can be to grow sometimes and the help that they sometimes require to germinate properly.
- ⇒ Due to the built in percentage of failure in seeds some people won't be able to grow anything no matter how hard they try and be disappointed.
- ⇒ While people have the best intentions to grow a pumpkin, the seed can easily be lost or forgotten.

The benefits of giving/selling a person a seedling are:

- ⇒ They have been given an actual growing plant; the hard work of germination has already been done for them.
- ⇒ They are way more likely to actually put a seedling into the ground increasing their chances of growing something and bringing it to your event.

The downsides to a seedling

But there are downsides to this whole seedling thing and that is money and time. There will be a cost somewhere for the pots they are in and the seed raising mix as well as the cost of the seed. It will take someone time to get them all growing and depending on how many you are wanting to have there might be a space concern as well.

I was talking to a plant nursery just last year who was telling me that not many people turned up to their competition they had, even though they had sold a lot of seeds earlier on with the outlook of a lot of people turning up with giant pumpkins looking quite positive.

After discussing the above points with them they could see how the seedlings would have been a better option especially as they were a nursery and easily had the resources available to do all of this easily.

So there we go, I've covered the type of seeds you need, and also gone through the benefits and possible down sides to either supplying seeds or seedlings.

Competition Categories

Reasons to have a pumpkin event are all sorted, the timing has been all agreed upon and seeds have been organised and a plan is really starting to take shape.

But what should people enter these pumpkins into to?

This usually comes down to having different categories for people to enter, and these can range from just a couple of basic ones to a varying amount of different ideas. Here are some that I have seen around the place:

- ⇒ Heaviest pumpkin - This is usually the standard and most basic category that everyone has, everyone wants to see how heavy their pumpkin is and if theirs is the heaviest.
- ⇒ Ugliest pumpkin - Not everyone can grow the best looking one and there are some real shockers out there.
- ⇒ Prettiest pumpkin - If you have the ugliest you might as well have the prettiest.
- ⇒ Best Creation - Let people's imaginations fly and see what amazing things they can make with pumpkins or other vegetables.
- ⇒ Cooking and baking - What can people create with the humble pumpkin or other produce.

The other part of the categories you will need to decide on is will you be breaking them up into age classes, an open type class for adults or older kids and maybe something age specific for different groups.

The more you break up the categories into ages the more certificates and prizes you may need if you are going to have those and if there is some sort of presentation to the winners then this also has to be considered. If split up too much you may only have one person automatically winning as they are the only person that is in the category.

Only you will be able to work this out, with information of expected people participating and just how easy you want to make it on yourself. For your first event only having a few is OK and if it goes well and a lot of people turn up the following year you will have more of an idea of how you want this all set up if you want to add more categories.

Making Money

With a lot of events out there the main goal is to make some money, this may be to fund-raise for something in particular for the group running the event, it may be to make money to support a charity or it might be to just make enough money to cover all the costs on the day.

Whatever the reason there are a few different ways you can approach the money making side of a giant pumpkin event.

- ⇒ You can pre-sell the seeds/seedlings to people that are keen to enter.
- ⇒ You can have an entry fee on the day for competitors, either a one off fee covering all events or a fee per event.
- ⇒ We've done a guess the weight of a pumpkin competition which proves popular; people pays a nominal fee to make a guess and the closest person to the actual weight weighed on the day wins a gift basket.
- ⇒ Raffles - Get some donated goods from local business and sell tickets, everyone likes being in for a chance to win.

Getting out there and spreading your word amongst local businesses can help, they can help either with items you may need on the day, or can help with prizes etc. You never know until you ask and why not challenge them to growing their own giant pumpkin while you're at it.

I'm sure you can think of many other ways to make money from your event but the main idea about charging for anything at your event is making sure people know why. People will always pay to support a good cause so make sure they know what it is.

Other attractions

If you have been to many different events over the years you will have a good idea of what would make your event a great success. While giant pumpkins are awesome and really are a draw card, they pretty much just sit there. If that is all you have people won't hang around for too long and you may be missing out on opportunities to either raise money or interact with people.

To keep people around you will need to think of other things to have at your event, if combined with something else then that should be quite easy to incorporate but if it is a standalone event you are organising then putting on your thinking cap early will help you out on the day.

Here are some things to think about:

- ⇒ Food - People get hungry, so either fire up the BBQ, bring a plate or bring in food vendors who will normally share a percentage of their profit with you just as a way of saying thanks for being at your event. Remember to book people early and to confirm dates, times etc.
- ⇒ Drinks - A lot of people can't function without coffee so making sure some hot drinks are available, water and anything else you might want as well.
- ⇒ Entertainment - Something to keep the crowds amused in between checking out pumpkins, this could be musical, theatrical or something else check what is out there in your community.
- ⇒ Something for the kids - Bouncy castles, rides, competitions, races, face painting. There is a lot of stuff out there that can keep the little kids and big kids at heart amused.
- ⇒ Good communication - Depending on the size of your event you may get away with someone with a loud voice or you may need a sound system but whatever the case may be make sure people know what is going on throughout the event.
- ⇒ Other activities - This can almost be anything, I've heard of gum-boot throwing, snail racing, sack races, egg and spoon for the kids or spade and pumpkin for the adults, people like competing and having fun.

These are just a few ideas that spring to mind, I'm sure you will have many other ideas that you can implement for your event. Having just the right amount of things for people to see and do for the amount of people that turn up at your event is always a challenge.

One of the crowd favourites at our local event is the downhill pumpkin rolling we do at the end of the day, there is nothing quite like seeing giant pumpkin roll and smash down the hill.



Downhill rolling carnage

Registration

Registration is the way of knowing whose pumpkin belongs to who and what category it is entered into if there is more than one to choose from.

It is also a great way to capture who is at an event by gathering their phone number or email which could be used to promote a future event.

If you do require a registration process and most competitions will need something in place make sure the person that is involved with this is friendly, knowledgeable and able to cope with a lot of people all at once.

Having a form that they can fill out with details is the best way I've seen to achieve this. On the following page is an idea you could use for your event, the numbers on the sheet are put onto the pumpkin entered so when judged later on we know who entered it, and can help speed up the prize giving process.

Every entry is going to have to be marked in some way so that judges or people will know who the pumpkin belongs to; the easiest way to do this is to write the number or name on the pumpkin with a good permanent marker.

If people aren't keen on that then an adhesive label or a pin to hold a name tag or some sort of sign in front.

Sample Registration Form

ID #	Name	Category	Email	Phone Number
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				

Weighing your pumpkins

As the most common category for these sorts of events is the heaviest pumpkin you will need some sort of scales to weigh them. The bigger the scales you can get the better and there are two types that seem to work quite well for weighing pumpkins;

Types of scales

One is the type used by farmers and vets to weigh calves, these usually consist of two load cell bars which a platform rests on top and the weights appear on a digital read out.

The other type is similar and is a platform scale; these are usually 1.2m square and have a digital read out screen that plugs into them.



Platform Scales

It is best to make sure the scales are set up on a nice even surface that is solid and won't let the scales sink into the ground.

As you may have no real idea of who is coming with what sized fruit it is good to think about the flow of traffic to and from the scales, having the participants be able to park as close as possible to the scales will be greatly appreciated without getting in the way of

pedestrians.

Having a large tarp handy and a bunch of strong people around will be a great idea also. With enough people and a large enough tarp or strong sheet for people to grab you will be able to move around pumpkins up to around 200 - 300kg's (depending on people) and always remember to lift safely.



Pumpkin being moved with a tarp

How to handle the really heavy giant pumpkins

Anything heavier than that you will really need to use some machinery, and the standard choices for this are tractor, hi ab or forklift. Whatever way you go in regards to what you will use to help lift the pumpkin you will need to make sure the machinery can get to the pumpkin scales easily, without getting stuck and doing it all safely with people around.



A pumpkin getting ready to go onto the scales

Having the pumpkin also attached securely to the machine is of utmost importance. If I had

to pick from the three machines mentioned above a truck with a hi-ab on the back of it would be my choice. The truck can be easily moved to near where it needs to be, the hi-ab can easily reach from a trailer to the scales, and the only thing moving is the arm which is above the pumpkin.

A decent amount of straps or strops will be needed to go around the pumpkin and provide enough support while not breaking the pumpkin when the weight is put onto them. A pumpkin lifting ring is an actual product that makes this whole process nice and easy.



A lifting ring in use

The ring holds the straps evenly spaced around the pumpkin and the drape down over the pumpkin with the bottoms being tied with another strap to chock the pumpkin where it is. This type of lifting setup can be used with any of the machinery.

To make things fair for everyone make sure there is nothing but the pumpkin on the scales, removed all straps, covers and sheets before taking the weight.

Safety First

Keeping people out of the way is an art form in itself and it pays to have a lot of people helping with both the lifting part of the pumpkin and crowd control. Even if you have everything marked out of bounds, and common sense would be to stay out of the area a giant pumpkin is being moved, common sense isn't that common and people will try and wander in and take a photo. Make sure to get them out of the area and be as safe as possible.

Prizes

Prizes are a nice incentive for people to enter but from my experience most people aren't expecting a prize or are growing for a prize. Most people just want to enter for the joy of entering and seeing how they compare to other people out there.

But something that everyone always seems to appreciate is a certificate, on numerous occasions I have heard from different people how much the certificate means to them, especially with children. It is something they will always have and can associate with a great day.



An example certificate

Make sure your prizes are age appropriate. No point in giving a child a prize more suited to an adult and vice versa.

Something that goes down quite well with all ages from my experience is gift certificates from the Warehouse.

Event Checklist

Here is a checklist you can use to make sure you have everything covered:

Name of your event:

Date of event:

People involved/contact info:

Items required:

Categories:

Other things to organise:

Prizes:

End of the event

Your event has been a success and everyone has had a good time. Now it is time to sit down and reflect on how it all went.

Write it all down

Everyone remembers things differently and one thing that may not have been good for you may have been good for someone else. So make sure to take time to talk to key people that were involved in your event, see what they have to say and make sure to write down all of this detail so you don't forget for the next event you have.

Talk to everyone

Think about what was positive what was negative and get feedback from people that entered the competitions or turned up on the day, find out what they want to see more or less of.

The thing with these types of events is that more and more people take up the challenge of growing a giant pumpkin every year, some people do it every year and others will take a break but with the word of mouth these days and the use of the Internet with the likes of Facebook you can be sure that more people will want to come to your event the following year.

The end

You've made it to the end of this free guide for organising a giant pumpkin event, well done and thanks.

Thanks for downloading this, I hope you find it useful in some way and can take something from it. If you have an event coming up feel free to list it on the Events page over at the website **www.giantpumpkins.co.nz** this is free to do and is just another way of getting your event details out there.

There is bound to be something I have forgotten to mention while putting together this document or you may have a question that you want to ask, feel free to email at:

contact@giantpumpkins.co.nz

Feel free to share this with anyone else that may find it useful, check out the website for more information on growing giant pumpkins, I also update the blog with news and info throughout the season, let me know if you have something you want to share, and also check us out on Facebook, www.facebook.com/giantpumpkinsnz

Thanks
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