



DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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To: Newsroom Directors and Assignment Editors

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Giant pumpkin contest announced It's "punkin plant'n time!"

The Delaware Agritourism Association, the Delaware Department of Agriculture, and the Delaware Cooperative Extension are inviting Delaware pumpkin growers and garden enthusiasts to help celebrate Delaware's bounty by competing in a giant pumpkin weigh-off that will be held on October 22, 2005 at Winkler Farms, 14255 S. DuPont Hwy., Harrington, DE. Top prize for the heaviest pumpkin in the contest will be \$400. Second and third prizes are \$150 and \$50 respectively. A fee of \$20 per entry will be collected. Contest rules are attached and also found on the DDA website: www.state.de.us/deptagri/default.shtml

Giant pumpkin contests continue to grow in popularity across the country. Winners of the contests range anywhere from 300 lbs. to more than 1200 lbs. Last year, Delaware's giant pumpkin contest produced a champion that weighed-in at 420 lbs.

Now is a good time to plant pumpkins of all kinds. Growers interested in producing giant pumpkins, should do some research and/or call the Cooperative Extension to find out about seeds, soil, and pest control. Cooperative Extension numbers follow: New Castle County – (302) 831-2667; Kent County – (302) 730-4000; Sussex County (302) 856-7303.

Regarding growing giant pumpkins, Ed Kee, Extension Vegetable Production Specialist says, "Pumpkins need warm weather to germinate. After they germinate, pour on the fertilizer and keep them watered. When one pumpkin is set on the vine, cut the other ones off of the vine so all of the energy goes into the one giant pumpkin."

Pumpkins are members of the Cucurbita family that includes cucumbers and squash. They have a long and delicious history. According to *The Pumpkin Nook* (<http://www.pumpkinnook.com>), "Pumpkins are believed to have originated in Central America. Seeds from related plants have been found in Mexico, dating back over 7000 years to 5500 B.C.

Native American Indians used pumpkin as a staple in their diets centuries before the pilgrims landed. When white settlers arrived, they saw the pumpkins grown by the Indians. Pumpkin soon became a staple in their diets, too. They also brought seeds back to Europe, where they quickly became popular. Just like today, early settlers used pumpkins in a wide variety of recipes, from desserts to stews and soups. In addition to cooking with pumpkins, they also dried the shells and cut strips to weave into mats.

Early settlers made pumpkin pie by filling a hollowed out shell with milk, honey and spices, then baking it. Whether they learned this from Native Americans is not known."

In 2004, Delaware farmers harvested 420 acres of pumpkins.

For more information on the Giant Pumpkin Weigh-in, contact Amanda Brown, Marketing Specialist at (800) 282-8685 (DE only), (302) 698-4523, or Amanda.brown@state.de.us.

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Entry Rules and Limitations

- 1) The pumpkin must be grown, cared for and exhibited by the grower. In cases of emergency (serious illness, death in the family, etc) the contest coordinator will make the decision as to allowing exceptions to the rule, and the contest coordinator's decision will be final.
 - 2) An exhibitor may enter no more than two entries per family/household.
 - 3) Each family (household) will be eligible for only one cash award per year.
 - 4) Color Requirements: To be eligible for the heaviest pumpkin, the specimen must be a minimum of 75% white to cream-yellow to orange in color. All others will be considered squash.
 - 5) The specimen must be sound, healthy, undamaged, free of rot, holes, cracks through the cavity, chemical (fungicides) residue and serious soft spots.
 - 6) No foreign material or carrying devices are permitted to be included in the weighing.
 - 7) Weights will be recorded in half pound increments, rounded down to the lowest half-pound.
 - 8) The vine must be trimmed to one inch from the stem of the fruit.
 - 9) The judges reserve the right to fully inspect each specimen before the weight is announced and official. Refusal to allow the inspection of an entry will cause said entry to be deemed "exhibition only."
 - 10) Any specimen previously entered or weighed at any other National or International competition prior to the Delaware contest is not eligible for competition.
 - 11) In the event of a tie, the prize money will be divided equally between the entrants.
 - 12) To be eligible for prize money, all specimens must be weighed without the use of tarps or other carrying devices
 - 13) The Delaware Department of Agriculture, the Delaware Agritourism Association, the Delaware Cooperative Extension, and Winkler Farms will not be responsible for any damage to specimens.
 - 14) ***Decisions of the judges are final in all cases.***
 - 15) ***Pre-registration is encouraged but not required.***
 - 16) All specimens must be accompanied by their owners, with a completed entry form if not pre-registered, and must arrive at Winkler Farms between 8 am and 9 am on October 22, 2005.
 - 17) For anyone with a pumpkin over 600 lbs., please plan to donate 100 seeds to the Delaware Agritourism Association. The seeds will be used to raise money for the Association.
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