

Santa Fe gardener has a gigantic green thumb when it comes to growing vegetables

By Staci Matlock | The New Mexican

10/27/2011



Photo by: [Clyde Mueller](#)/The New Mexican

Oh, Great Pumpkin, in Santa Fe your name is Mad Max.

Max is the 448-pound orange behemoth, a new state record, grown by Santa Fean Jannine Cabossel. The pumpkin was weighed at a contest in Colorado Springs, Colo., on Oct. 17, where it tied for second place overall.

It wasn't the only record-breaking veggie Cabossel harvested this year. She broke two other state veggie records with a 340-pound green winter squash, dubbed Kryptonite, and

King Zuc II, a 62-pound zucchini. She thought her 80-inch gourd, Jake the Snake, had set a new record, but learned it needed half an inch more. She also grew a giant pear gourd that tipped the scales at 103 pounds, but no records are kept on them.

The Giant Pumpkin Commonwealth, a coalition of more than 30 clubs around the world, keeps stats on record-breaking pumpkins and other squash at sanctioned "weigh-off" events. New Mexico doesn't have a giant-pumpkin club, so Jannine has been learning tips from growers in Colorado. She hopes more New Mexicans will start raising the giants. "I'm hoping to get some competition," said Cabossel, who saves her giant-pumpkin seeds and gives them away.

Her biggest local competition is from someone named Danny O out of Las Cruces. She took the state pumpkin record away from him last year with a 421-pounder named Kong. "My goal is 500 pounds next year," she said.

A 751-pound pumpkin won the Colorado Springs competition. The world record this year was a 1,818-pound pumpkin grown in Canada.

Cabossel once thought people who pampered giant pumpkins were "a bunch of nuts."

Three years ago, the professional glass-blower, who also sells tomatoes at the Santa Fe Farmers Market, became one of them. She saw a show about the pumpkin weigh-offs on the PBS television network and decided to try it out. She ordered giant-pumpkin seeds online via Amazon. In her first season, she grew a 225-pounder. "I got hooked," she said. "At the height of its growth, it puts on 15 to 20 pounds a day. You see these big orange globes among all the green. They are so beautiful."

When Axle Contemporary gallery owners Matthew Chase-Daniel and Jerry Wellman saw Cabossel's vegetables, they saw living art. "They're very pale in color and not like these perfect round things. They're flat on bottom from the weight," said Chase-Daniel. "They looked like something between a (Johan) Vemeer painting and a Claes Oldenburg sculpture. They are slightly elegant and slightly cumbersome."

Plus, said Chase-Daniel, "the way Jannine thinks about her vegetables is the way artists think about art. She's very involved in the organic process, helping them grow, similar to the way a sculptor lives with a piece of work over time."

"This is like a still life, only enormous size," said Cabossel as she showed off Max and Kryptonite.

Chase-Daniel and Wellman rigged an old flatbed trailer and with help and some rigging hoisted the giant vegetables on a platform. They park it at a different spot each day for the public to see. "This really is a moveable feast," said Wellman.

Pumpkins like Max start from seeds no bigger than small paper clips. They aren't genetically modified in a laboratory. They are hybrids, crossed the old-fashioned way, Cabossel said. The seeds are carefully selected each year by farmers from the best fruits. The flowers are pollinated by hand. Mad Max's mom (the seed) is a giant pumpkin. His dad (the pollinator) is actually a green winter squash (basically a green pumpkin).

The secret to growing them? A whole host of things — water, the right weather and really great soil. Cabossel adds all natural nutrients to her soil such as aged horse manure and compost. When Max was putting on weight and it was hot, he needed 15 gallons of water a day dripped to his roots.

The vines sprawl across 500 square feet or more. The leaves are 18 inches wide or more. Cabossel culls out flowers too close to the stem or fruits that aren't growing. Max was such a hog, he ended up as the only fruit on his vine. "He took all the juice," she said.

Cabossel refuses to sing or play music for her veggies. She does blanket them as the weather turns cold. And the big boys like Max? "I hug them, talk to them and pat them," she said.

When the traveling show ends the first weekend of August, Max is headed for the ax. Cabossel plans to let the people who've helped cart him around carve him up and make pumpkin pies and soup.

She'll save the seeds for next year.

Cabossel's record breakers will be on display through Nov. 4 on a utility trailer in various places

around town courtesy of Axle Contemporary, a mobile gallery. You can see more photos and read Cabossel's tips for growing giant veggies at her blog, <http://giantveggiegardener.com/>.

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SQUASH SUPERSTARS

New Mexico state record, 2011: **Mad Max, 448 pounds**

World record: **1,818 pounds**

Number of pumpkin pies possible from Mad Max: **597**

CATCH MAD MAX

Mad Max and his companions will be on display at the following locations in the Axle Contemporary truck, from mid-morning to mid-afternoon:

Friday: Baca Street Studios, 926 Baca St.

Saturday: Near the Farmers Market/SITE Santa Fe on Paseo de Peralta

Sunday: Somewhere along Canyon Road

Oct. 31: La Montanita Coop, Solana Center on Alameda Street

Nov. 1: By Quick Fix Auto Glass on corner of Cordova Road and St. Francis Drive

Nov. 2: Old Las Vegas Highway at the roadside market near the Sunrise Store

Nov. 4: Baca Street Studios, 926 Baca St.