

**On Being a Farm Wife**  
(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



Tiny things they were, in the whole scheme of life.

Yet compared to other seeds, the pumpkin ones that came in the mail one morning in March were impressive. I'd anteed up a buck, plus tax, for about a dozen of the one-by-half-inch, flat, cream-colored seeds of a super-giant variety. Within their hard shell was everything needed for life, with a little hand from Mother Nature.

Since Mother wasn't quite up to snuff with warm weather then, the seeds were tucked into starter pots in the greenhouse. Cultivating humongous pumpkins has become something of a cottage industry hereabouts. York Fair's Giant Pumpkin Contest, underwritten at one-dollar-per-pound for the three largest by Brown's Orchard and Farm Market, has probably helped stimulate the friendly competition.

Our intent was not a prizewinner, just a "for fun" planting for some of our favorite kids. Between the old and new dairy barns is a gentle slope of about 15 feet, its soil highly enriched with well-aged cow manure. Because it's surrounded by buildings and cattle lots, the small area is inaccessible to mowing equipment and grows

awesome weeds.

Pumpkins, we've discovered, spread thickly and rapidly enough in the damp, rich soil to shade out most other competition. Last year's harvest of neck pumpkins was far more than we, relatives, friends and a few strangers we pawed them off onto could figure out what to do with.

After having visited the site where last year's fair winner was produced and seeing other giant pumpkins scattered around like so many huge, orange boulders, I was hooked. It would be interesting to see what our little corner could do with this challenge.

With the cool, damp of spring, it got pretty late until the pumpkin seedlings, already poking vines out of their pots, went into the ground. The Farmer thought we should nip the ends of the vines and allow only one fruit to set per vine. But by the time they began setting infant pumpkins, the tangled growth was knee-high, thick as a jungle and impossible to walk through without injuring them. Those baby pumpkins were on their own. Besides, the constant rain kept the slope downright

slippery.

Finally, in mid-August, I waded in and began peeking under the thick canopy of leaves. And came out jubilant, having uncovered about a half dozen of the biggest pumpkins we'd ever grown. (None, however, would come close to a friend's 464-pounder that set a new York Fair record).

Periodic forays through the tangled mess of growth uncovered a few more. Eight . . . 10 . . . 14. The count kept inching higher. Several of the largest I couldn't begin to lift.

While visiting a few weeks ago, my cousin's oldest son gleefully spied the pumpkin patch. He returned a few evenings later, his two little brothers in tow, to help The Farmer harvest them. They rolled them — one at a time — into a garden cart. I returned from a meeting to stumble my way through the pumpkin patch on the porch.

We mixed suggestions to sell the giants in favor of the greater fun of sharing them. The harvesting trio claimed several. A niece has a couple more. My mother-in-law's porch sports one of the giants, as do the homes of employees and friends.

We kept just one. It's a near-perfect "pumpkin" shape, some 20 inches high, two feet-plus across the middle, with a circumference of more than six feet. In an earlier life, it may have been Cinderella's coach. In this life, it will be our Halloween pumpkin, perhaps with glued-on facial features, and then be converted into yet another life as pies, cake and bread.

And in the spring it will live again.

This baby should yield enough seeds to cover the whole neighborhood in orange.

**Hershey Museum**

**Offers Children's Classes**

**HERSHEY (Dauphin Co.)** — The Hershey Museum is offering seven fun-filled and educational classes for children throughout the fall season. All classes will be held at the museum and do require advance registration. Registration fees are listed with each class.

**"MR. BOTTLE—BONES"** (Ages 9-10) Saturday, Oct. 26, 10-11:30 a.m. Make a life-size skeleton just in time for Halloween! Learn more about skeletons and bones in this bone-shaking class. Participants need to bring nine clean 1-gallon plastic milk or water jugs. \$6 members, \$9 nonmembers.

**"KID POWERED"** (Ages 5-7) Saturday, Nov. 9, 10-11:30 a.m. You don't need batteries, just Kid Power, for these games and toys which have delighted and fascinated youngsters for centuries. Learn games like clay marbles and jacks, try your hand at other skill games, and explore some special old-time toys! \$5 members, \$8 nonmembers.

**"MADE FROM MILK"** (Ages 7-9) Saturday, Nov. 16, 10-11:30 a.m. Today, getting butter is easy — go to the grocery store and buy it. But less than 100 years ago, that rich spread for pancakes and bread took much more time and energy. This class explores butter making using a variety of methods from old to new. Of course, the tasting is an important element also! \$6 member, \$9 nonmembers.

**"RAVEN'S WINGS AND WHALES' TALES"** (Ages 4-6) Saturday, Nov. 16, 10-11:00 a.m. Bet you never thought the Hershey Museum was a place to see all types of critters! Explore the Hershey Museum and all of the different animals we have here. This interactive class will feature music and a make-and-take project that will delight the younger children. \$5 members, \$8 nonmembers.

**"SUGAR AND SPICES"** (Ages 4-6) Saturday, Dec. 14, 10-11:30 a.m. Just in time for the holidays! Have fun creating batches of traditional cookies to take home and share with friends and family. Along the way you'll learn about measuring, mixing, cutting, baking, cooperating and having fun. \$6 members, \$9 nonmembers.

**"COOKIE COTTAGES"** (Ages 7 and up) Sunday, Dec. 15, 1-2:15 p.m. Budding architects and builders will delight in constructing their "one-of-a-kind" cottages decorated with a bounty of colorful candies and dusted with a coating of powdered sugar snow. \$11 members, \$13 nonmembers.

Call (717) 534-3439 for more information on any of these programs. The Hershey Museum is a non-profit, educational and cultural institution administered by the M. S. Hershey Foundation and is located at the west end of the Hersheypark Arena.

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