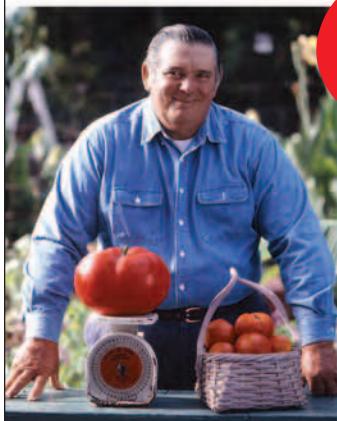


Giant Tomatoes



Gordon Graham, a painting contractor from Edmond, OK, grew the world's heaviest tomato in 1986. The tomato was grown from the variety *Delicious* and weighed 7 pounds, 12 ounces. He also grew a cherry tomato plant that was 28 feet tall and 53-1/2 feet wide. Every year he grew 25 to 50 tomato plants of many varieties. He then selected the best plants for special attention, as he searched for prize-winning tomatoes.

Gordon started early. He lived near Oklahoma City, but still put his plants out in the garden in early February, whereas the local custom was planting in late April. Gordon was picking tomatoes by late April! In the early season, his tomato plants were insulated using *Walls O' Water*, water filled jackets that he placed inside his tomato cages. He further protected his plants by wrapping them in row-cover fabric, and "covered all the bases" by singing country music to them.

are still being utilized today. Gordon passed away in 1997.

His record tomato was found accidentally when a large tomato plant fell over into his melon patch after a wind storm. Tending his melons, he found the tomato. Gordon was later hired by *Miracle-Gro*, and travelled the country giving talks about tomatoes.

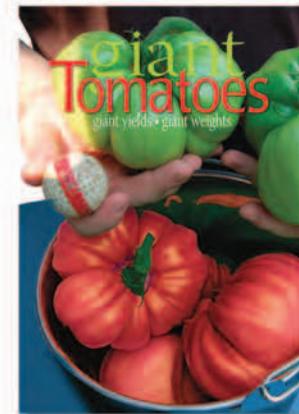
Today's competitive giant tomato growers (who happen to be average backyard gardeners like yourself) use a variety of methods to grow prize winning tomatoes. Surprisingly, there are many similarities in the methods they use, and a mutually accepted truth is:

To grow a giant tomato, you must first start seed from a large-fruited variety, then select a megabloom for special attention. With careful pruning, feeding, watering and culling, you may grow a monster.



Gordon also paid special attention to his soil. When he moved into his house in Edmond, his backyard was solid clay and his front yard was pure sand. Gradually he mixed them together. He gathered leaves from the oak trees on his property, chopped them with a chipper-shredder, mixed them with manure, allowed them to decompose for a year, then spread the "black gold" compost on his garden. Soon his soil was the color of devil's food cake.

He pinched off all the flowers until the stem was 1/4 inch in diameter at the base of the plant, then pruned the new flower clusters to produce only one to two fruit per cluster. He grew his tomatoes in 5 foot high cages made of concrete reinforcing wire, but stacked them three high, supporting them with wooden stakes and anchoring the towers with a trellis. Many of the techniques used by Gordon Graham



The Megabloom!

The most important secret to growing a giant tomato is the megabloom. It is a fused flower that has two or more blossoms growing together on just one stem. Some varieties like *Big Zac*, *Delicious*, *Supersteak*, and many others, have a higher incidence of these unusual flowers. If you're going to grow giant tomatoes, you can't compete without a megabloom.

Each member blossom represents a potential tomato, and if all are successfully pollinated, you'll have all of them growing from a single stem. That's why a mature tomato from a megabloom often looks

like several tomatoes growing together, and why all the big ones appear incredibly mishapen. If the variety of tomato you are growing is able to produce a 2 pound tomato on a normal flower, a flower made up of two fused blossoms may give you a 3 to 4 pounder. Under ideal conditions, a megabloom will produce a tomato that has a weight that is 3/4's its normal size times the number of blossoms. So, a 4-blossom flower can potentially grow a 6 pound tomato, if the average weight of the variety is 2 pounds.

If you want to grow big tomatoes, start with a variety advertised for size, look for the magic megabloom, then cull and eat the other tomatoes until you're down to just one fruit – the one produced from the megabloom!



Giant Tomatoes is written by Marvin Meisner, a retired cardiologist from Hollidaysburg, PA. *Giant Tomatoes* is a fascinating book on growing tomatoes for both weight and yield. Thirty-one chapters in full color cover everything.

Available online at www.giantpumpkin.com, or book sellers everywhere.

