

Pumpkin Lifting Tripods

So you have heard or read about growing Giant Pumpkins and are eager to give it a try yourself. But knowing that world-class growers can produce Giants well over 2,000 pounds, you are a little leery of how one would move such a monster. The majority of Hoosiers do not live on a farm and don't have easy access to tractors, front end loaders or forklifts. You may be surprised to learn that most Giant Pumpkins are not lifted out of the patch using power equipment. This article will provide instructions on how an ordinary person can construct an affordable pumpkin lifting tripod which in the past has been used to raise up Giant Pumpkins up to 1 ton in weight.

But first, some other considerations. Though you may be an experienced gardener, the planning, soil prep and overall care required during the growing season are well beyond anything you have attempted in the garden previously. Put simply, although there are exceptions, most first year growers are unlikely to grow a Giant Pumpkin so large as to require power equipment to move.

Giant Pumpkins up to around 800 pounds can generally easily be lifted using a specially reinforced tarp with the aid of 7-10 strong friends, relatives or neighbors. The fruit is rolled up so the tarp can be slipped under it. It is then lifted onto a pallet in the bed of your truck or on your trailer.

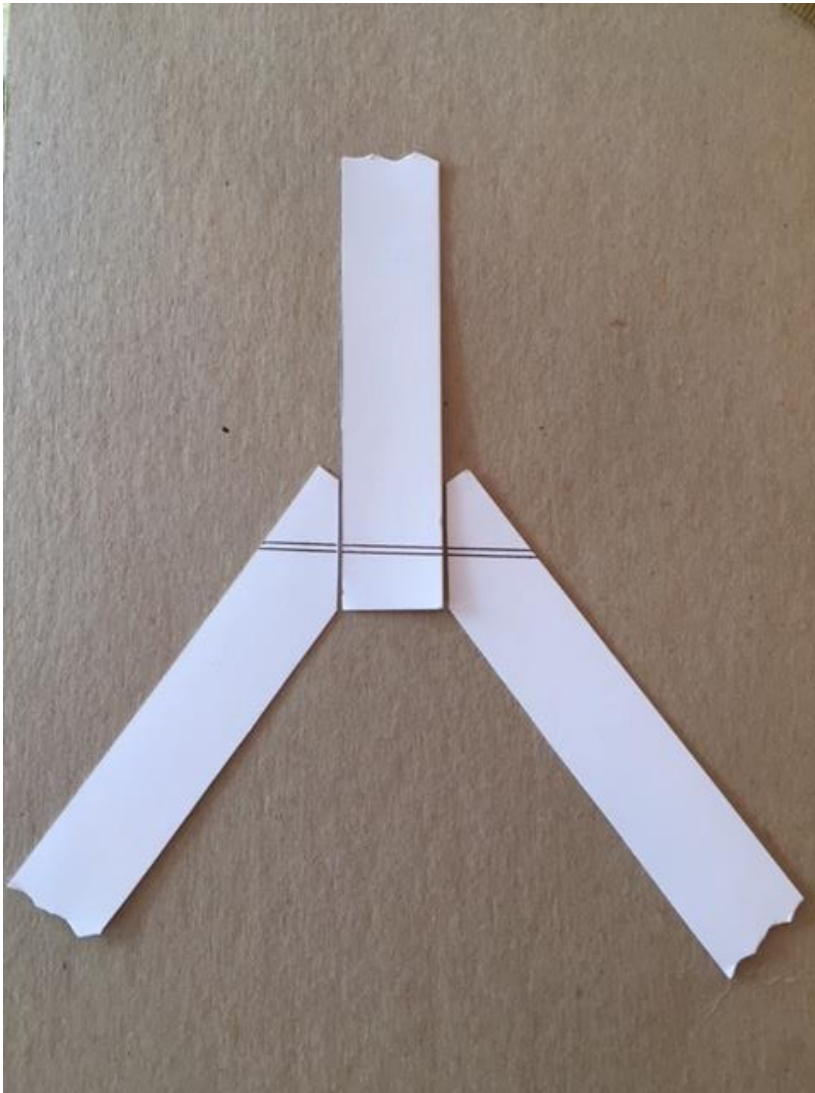


The supplies for a simple lifting tripod are: 4" x 4" timbers 16' long - 3

$\frac{3}{4}$ " threaded steel rod 1.5 – 2' long - 1

$\frac{3}{4}$ " nuts and washers - 2

Also needed is a power drill with a $\frac{15}{16}$ " drill bit. It is necessary to cut 2 of the 4 x 4s so they properly abut the third leg. Cuts are made at 30-40 degrees from $6\frac{1}{2}$ " from one end angling up to where around $1\frac{1}{2}$ " thickness remains. See diagram below.



A 15/16" hole is drilled inline through the 3 pieces. Assembling the tripod close to the pumpkin patch is advised. The 3/4" steel rod is placed through the holes and secured with a washer and nut on each end.

Then it is a matter of lifting the center up. It takes a robust individual to do this as each timber weighs roughly 50 pounds. Much easier is to have 3 or 4 individuals with the 1 in the center lifting it and the others moving the legs in toward the center. Alternatively, if 2 of the legs are stabilized, the third can be lifted and advanced toward the center, raising the tripod up. If assembly of the tripod takes place close to the patch, it can easily be "walked" over the pumpkin by moving 1 leg at a time. A chain is placed over the top of the tripod. I generally do this after the tripod is up as otherwise you are lifting it too. An option is to attach a Dori sling to the chain as it is strong but still light and this extends it lower. A block and tackle/chain hoist is then attached to the chain or Dori Sling. Naturally, you need to ensure that each of the load-bearing components is rated beyond the expected weight of your pumpkin.



It will take an hour or so to clear the vines to enable a clear path to back your truck or trailer toward the pumpkin. I always place a thick doubled-up blanket on top of the pumpkin. This prevents it from being damaged if anything drops onto it. The tripod is positioned so that the chain hangs down directly over the center of the pumpkin. You also need to position it so that you may easily back your truck or trailer between 2 of the legs.

Then to the block and tackle/chain hoist you attach a pumpkin lifting ring. See pic below. It is probably beyond most of us to create a lifting ring so it is generally best to simply purchase one. My lifting ring is 26" in diameter. I obtained it several years ago, but I believe the expense was around \$250. The maker is no longer constructing them, however a search on www.bigpumpkins.com should yield 2 or 3 sources. These sturdy steel rings have heavy duty seatbelt straps attached to them. The straps have a loop at the loose end and through these loops a strong rope or strap is run. This is cinched tight around the bottom of the pumpkin.



The block and tackle/chain hoist is then used to crank the pumpkin up. As it is lifted, the legs of the tripod sink into the soft garden soil and will not slip out. Many people ensure this by pounding a piece of rebar into the ground to stop the legs from moving.



The pumpkin patch being on a significant slope can complicate matters. It may be helpful to approximate the length of the legs by digging holes under the legs at the high point. Oh, don't forget to cut the main vine loose! The pumpkin is then carefully lowered toward the central point of the pallet in your truck or on your trailer.

Figure an hour to accomplish your pumpkin loading the first time. Subsequent lifts can be performed in around 20 minutes as you become more comfortable with it. The lift can be done with just 2 individuals, however additional pairs of eyes and hands are very helpful. We invite friends, family and neighbors and make a lifting party of it with snacks/refreshments of your choice. Many people have never seen a pumpkin this large, much less the spectacle of lifting one!

After the weighoff, when unloading the pumpkin onto the driveway at home, additional precautions are taken. Hooks are driven into the legs of the tripod and chains are secured between them. This prevents the legs from slipping out if they are placed on concrete.



At the end of the season, the tripod is disassembled and stored away. There are fancier lifting devices as well as commercial lifting tripods available. However, the lifting tripod described here can be assembled for only \$68.31. Plus tax, Uncle Sam wants his cut, ha! The block and tackle and lifting ring obviously are an additional expense.

Grow 'em BIG!!!