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LIFT VAULT GUIDE

2026

The ten most popular programs, recommended routines, and the Lift Vault Method.

Hey folks,

The last one of these came out in 2023. Since then I've gotten a steady trickle of emails asking if there'd be another one. Here it is.

This is a guide on how to use Lift Vault most effectively.

It contains three sections:

1. Popular programs
2. Recommended routines
3. Lift Vault Method

Popular programs is democracy in action, a simple ranking of the most frequently accessed programs on Lift Vault over the past twelve months. Most are great programs, but there are a couple I wouldn't necessarily recommend.

Something else worth pointing out: in 2023, three of the top five were bodybuilding or powerbuilding programs. This year the top five are all powerlifting or strength programs. That says something about who's reading the site these days, and the recommendations in this guide lean that way too.

The **recommended routines** section is where I recognize some excellent programs that didn't make the top 10.

Lift Vault Method is essentially a quick start guide to Lift Vault. If you're trying to get stronger or grow as a powerlifter, Lift Vault Method is a sequence of programs you could run from the novice to advanced level.

If you have any feedback, please email kyle@liftvault.com.

As always, I truly appreciate your support of Lift Vault and hope you get value out of this guide.

To your continued gains,
Kyle

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01

Popular Programs

Ranking based on September 2025 to August 2026

The top 10 at a glance

Ranking based on September 2025 to August 2026. "vs 2023" compares against the last guide.

#	PROGRAM	DAYS	GOAL	LEVEL	VS 2023	PAGE
1	**Wendler 5/3/1**	4 (2 and 3 day versions exist)	strength	all levels	▲ #4	6
2	**GZCL**	3–4 (GZCLP); varies by template	strength, powerlifting	beginner through advanced	new	7
3	**Candito 6 Week**	3–5	powerlifting (peaking)	intermediate, advanced	▲ #7	8
4	**Calgary Barbell**	4	powerlifting (peaking)	intermediate, advanced	▲ #6	9
5	**nSuns**	4 (5 and 6 day variants exist)	strength	intermediate	▼ #1	10
6	**Sheiko**	varies	powerlifting	all levels	▲ #8	11
7	**Bullmastiff**	4	strength	intermediate, advanced	new	12
8	**Tactical Barbell**	2–4	strength, alongside conditioning	all levels	new	13
9	**PHUL**	4	powerbuilding	intermediate	▼ #5	14
10	**Juggernaut Method**	4	strength	intermediate	new	15

#1 ▲ UP FROM #4

Wendler 5/3/1

01

The most popular program on Lift Vault. It's slow, but it works for just about anyone who sticks with it.

TRAINING DAYS 4 (2 and 3 day versions exist)	GOALS strength	EXPERIENCE all levels
CREATOR Jim Wendler	APP Boostcamp (5/3/1 and BBB)	

LINKS 5/3/1 on Lift Vault | Boring But Big | 5/3/1 Calculator | 5/3/1 Glossary | 5/3/1 Forever (Amazon)

What can I say about Jim Wendler's 5/3/1 that hasn't already been said? It's been around since 2009 and it's still the most-viewed program on Lift Vault.

The basics: you work off a training max set at 90% of your real max, run three weeks of 5s, then 3s, then 1s on the four big lifts, deload, and add 5 lbs to your upper body maxes and 10 lbs to your lower body maxes. Everything after the main sets is where the dozens of variations come from.

So which 5/3/1? Start with the base template. If you want to get bigger while you get stronger, add Boring But Big: 5 sets of 10 on the main lift at 50-60% after your work sets. Most people who run 5/3/1 for years end up on some version of BBB. The later templates (5s PRO, leaders and anchors) are all in *5/3/1 Forever*.

Note: the most common way people mess this program up is setting the training max too high. The 5/3/1 calculator on the site handles that math for you (and builds BBB, FSL, SSL and joker sets while it's at it). If any of those terms are new to you, the 5/3/1 glossary explains every one of them with a worked example.

If you're a novice still adding weight to the bar every session, 5/3/1 is going to feel painfully slow. Run a linear progression program first and come back when that stops working.

02

#2 NEW

GZCL

One tier system, a whole bunch of programs. GZCL wasn't in the 2023 guide at all. Now it's #2.

TRAINING DAYS 3–4 (GZCLP); varies by template	GOALS strength, powerlifting	EXPERIENCE beginner through advanced
CREATOR Cody Lefever (/u/gzcl)	APP Boostcamp (GZCLP)	

LINKS GZCLP Spreadsheets | GZCL Templates | Cody's Blog

Everything GZCL is built on three tiers. T1 is the day's main lift, heavy and low rep. T2 is a variation of it at moderate weight for moderate reps. T3 is high rep accessory work. How each tier progresses is what separates one GZCL program from another.

GZCLP is the linear progression version and the place to start. Three or four days a week, add weight every time a lift comes up, and the last set of each tier is an AMRAP. It moves as fast as Starting Strength, but the tier structure gets you way more volume per session. People who outgrow it tend to be in good shape to move on to something harder.

The templates (Jacked & Tan 2.0, UHF, The Rippler, General Gainz) are for intermediates who have stalled on linear progression. They assume you understand the tier logic, so definitely read Cody's GZCL Applications & Adaptations post before picking one. His blog, Swole at Every Height, is the official source for everything GZCL and worth a read on its own.

New to lifting? GZCLP. Stalled on GZCLP? Pick a template. Pretty simple.

#3 ▲ UP FROM #7

Candito 6 Week

03

One of the most popular peaking programs on Lift Vault, especially for squats. A personal favorite.

TRAINING DAYS	GOALS	EXPERIENCE
3–5	powerlifting (peaking)	intermediate, advanced
CREATOR	**APP**	
Jonnie Candito	Boostcamp	

LINKS Candito 6 Week on Lift Vault | Bench Hybrid Version | Candito's YouTube

The infamous Candito 6 week program has rightfully earned a reputation as one of the best powerlifting peaking programs available, especially for the squat. Six weeks in, you test a new max. The deadlift work is solid too.

The bench press portion tends to get mixed reviews, which led to users building a hybrid version of the program that swaps in Candito's Advanced Bench Press Program. That's one option.

The other option, and the one I'd point most people toward, is to skip the bench portion entirely and run Greg Nuckols' 3x Intermediate Medium Load bench program alongside it. It's from his 28 Programs bundle and hits bench three times a week at moderate volume. It's a big favorite among Lift Vault readers. Candito for squat and deadlift, Nuckols for bench. Hard to beat.

Even though it's a peaking program, you can run it back to back. Just expect to hit a wall eventually.

04

#4 ▲ UP FROM #6

Calgary Barbell

Consistently effective peaking programs for powerlifting meets. Among the best peaking programs on Lift Vault, and it held onto its traffic better than almost anything on this list.

TRAINING DAYS 4	GOALS powerlifting (peaking)	EXPERIENCE intermediate, advanced
CREATOR Bryce Krawczyk	APP Boostcamp	

LINKS Calgary Barbell on Lift Vault | calgarybarbell.com

If you're looking to prepare for a powerlifting meet, look no further. These programs are some of the best reviewed programs on Lift Vault and have likely helped hundreds of powerlifters peak for their meets.

Whether you run the 8 week or 16 week version depends on how much time you have before your meet.

You will be squatting three times a week, benching four times a week, and deadlifting three times a week. That counts variations, so you're only doing each competition lift once. Here's what a week in the first block of the 16 week program looks like:

- **Day 1:** competition squat, competition (paused) bench, overhead press and rows
- **Day 2:** competition deadlift, 3 count pause bench, SSB or front squat
- **Day 3:** pin squat, 2 board press, dumbbell rows
- **Day 4:** paused deadlift, touch and go bench, stiff leg deadlift

Don't sleep on this one.

05

#5 ▼ DOWN FROM #1

nSuns

The most popular program on Lift Vault from 2017 through 2024. Still top five, and still a great next step once a novice program stops working.

TRAINING DAYS	GOALS	EXPERIENCE
4 (5 and 6 day variants exist)	strength	intermediate
CREATOR	**APP**	
/u/nSuns	Boostcamp	

LINKS nSuns on Lift Vault

I added nSuns to Lift Vault in 2017 and it was the most popular program on the site for seven straight years. It slipped to #5 this year.

There are still good reasons to run it:

1. It is easy to follow.
2. It gets people stronger.

Inspired by Jim Wendler's 5/3/1, nSuns progresses on a weekly basis vs. the 3 week cycles used by traditional 5/3/1. This makes it well-suited for novice trainees who have stopped progressing on standard linear progression programs like Greyskull, Starting Strength or StrongLifts.

The most notable changes a novice lifter will notice when beginning nSuns are that the training volume is much higher, more rep ranges are used, and each lift is trained less often.

Don't be fooled by the lower frequency. You'll make up for it in volume. Nine working sets on the main lift is no joke.

06

#6 ▲ UP FROM #8

Sheiko

Off-season and peaking programs from one of the best powerlifting coaches in the world.

TRAINING DAYS
varies

GOALS
powerlifting

EXPERIENCE
all levels

CREATOR
Boris Sheiko

LINKS Sheiko on Lift Vault | Sheiko Gold

Boris Sheiko has rightfully earned the recognition as one of the greatest powerlifting coaches of all time. His students have won dozens of gold medals at world championships and have set multiple world records.

There are all kinds of spreadsheets attributed to Sheiko floating around the internet. There are some clearly labeled "beginner," "intermediate," and "advanced" programs with different load values. I'd recommend starting with these instead of the "numbered" programs.

Whether you're peaking or trying to build your base in the off-season, there is a Sheiko spreadsheet for you.

You can also check out the Sheiko Gold app, which runs autoregulated versions of his programs.

Be warned: the volume is high. These programs assume you can squat, bench, and deadlift multiple times per week without your technique falling apart.

07

#7 NEW

Bullmastiff

Alex Bromley's 18 week program from *Peak Strength*: nine weeks building a base, nine weeks peaking. Your AMRAP sets determine the loads the whole way through.

TRAINING DAYS
4

GOALS
strength

EXPERIENCE
intermediate, advanced

CREATOR
Alex Bromley (Empire Barbell)

LINKS Bullmastiff on Lift Vault | Empire Barbell | Peak Strength (Amazon)

Bullmastiff comes from Alex Bromley's book *Peak Strength*. It's four days a week, with each day built around one of the four big lifts plus developmental and accessory work, split across two 9 week phases.

The base phase is three 3 week waves that ramp up the volume and build work capacity. The peak phase drops the volume and cranks up the intensity, pointing you at a new 1RM in the squat, bench, deadlift and overhead press. AMRAP sets drive the weekly loading and the spreadsheet does the math for you.

This one is for intermediate and advanced lifters who want a long runway to a real peak. 18 weeks is a real commitment, so make sure you're up for it before you start. If not, there are plenty of shorter options in this guide.

#8 NEW

Tactical Barbell

08

Short, submaximal strength training for people whose job comes first. New to the top 10.

TRAINING DAYS	GOALS	EXPERIENCE
2–4	strength, alongside conditioning	all levels

CREATOR
K. Black

LINKS Tactical Barbell on Lift Vault | tacticalbarbell.com | Tactical Barbell (Amazon) | Mass Protocol (Amazon)

Tactical Barbell is K. Black's strength system (laid out in the *first book*) for military, law enforcement, firefighters, and anyone else who has to train hard on the conditioning side too. The Lift Vault spreadsheet has the Operator, Zulu, Fighter, Gladiator, Mass and Grey Man templates in one file with 1RM inputs and drop-down menus.

Sessions are short and submaximal: 70% to 90% of your 1RM in 3 week waves on a 6 week cycle. Most templates run two to four days per week, so there's a version for just about any schedule.

If you want a minimalist strength base that leaves room for the rest of your life, it's hard to beat.

#9 ▼ DOWN FROM #5

PHUL

09

A reasonable upper/lower split that balances power and hypertrophy. The only powerbuilding program left in the top 10.

TRAINING DAYS	GOALS	EXPERIENCE
4	powerbuilding	intermediate

CREATOR	APP
Brandon Campbell	Boostcamp

LINKS PHUL on Lift Vault

PHUL (Power Hypertrophy Upper Lower) is sort of a less intense version of PHAT. Both are powerbuilding programs, but PHUL only has four training days per week instead of six. That's probably why it outlasted PHAT on this list.

PHUL is a pretty standard upper/lower split, with each muscle group getting a "power" and "hypertrophy" focus day. It's nothing fancy, but if you're in need of a structured program it'll at least deliver that.

Be warned: PHUL does not come with progression out of the box. This will be for you to figure out on your own. Well, you're not *completely* on your own. Here's a Reddit thread with people discussing what PHUL progression methods worked for them.

If this is an issue for you, then you may be better off with a powerbuilding program that calculates loads for you (e.g. BroGains).

#10 NEW

Juggernaut Method

16 weeks, four waves, submaximal volume building up to an AMRAP each month. Kind of like 5/3/1's big brother.

TRAINING DAYS
4

GOALS
strength

EXPERIENCE
intermediate

CREATOR
Chad Wesley Smith

LINKS Juggernaut Method on Lift Vault | Inverted Juggernaut | Juggernaut Training Systems | The Juggernaut Method 2.0 (Amazon)

The Juggernaut Method trains the squat, bench, deadlift and overhead press four days a week, one primary lift per session with supplemental and accessory work after it. It runs four waves of four weeks each (10s, 8s, 5s, 3s), and every wave follows the same sequence: accumulation, intensification, realization (an AMRAP), deload.

Like 5/3/1, you work from a training max set at 90% of your 1RM. The AMRAP in week three of each wave sets the next wave's numbers, so the program corrects itself if you started too heavy or too light. Compared to 5/3/1, there's a good deal more volume in the early waves. The full method, with the progression rules, is in Chad's book *The Juggernaut Method 2.0*.

The **Inverted** version flips the first two waves to 10×5 and 8×5 instead of 5×10 and 5×8. Same number of reps, but your form is a lot less likely to fall apart deep into a set of 10. If that sounds like you, run the inverted version.

Dropped out of the top 10

Four programs from the 2023 guide that fell out of the top 10, and where they landed.

- Reddit PPL (#2 → #16). The 2023 guide called it a bit of a meme program and not one I'd necessarily recommend. Looks like readers agree.
- PHAT (#3 → #14). Six days a week is a lot to ask, and PHUL does most of the same job in four.
- Israetel Hypertrophy (#9 → #13, and down 79% in a year). The old spreadsheet was built on Mike's 2017 volume landmarks. It was rebuilt in September 2026 around RP's updated 2024 numbers, so if you looked at it before and passed, it's worth another look.
- Strong Curves (#10 → #17). Still a good beginner program, and Bret Contreras's *book* is worth having if you run it. The spreadsheet was rebuilt in 2026 to correct some inaccuracies.

02

Recommended Routines

Excellent programs that didn't make the top 10

Recommended Routines

These programs weren't among the 10 most popular, but are still worthy of recognition.

Definitely give these a try if they sound interesting to you and you're looking for something new.

Best Squat Programs

1. Russian Squat Routine
2. Candito Advanced Squat Program

Best Bench Press Programs

1. Nuckols 28 Programs: 3x Intermediate Medium Load
2. Russian Bench Press Program
3. Candito Advanced Bench Press Hybrid

Best Deadlift Programs

1. Coan/Phillipi Deadlift Program
2. MagOrt Deadlift Program

Best Novice Programs

1. Greyskull LP
2. Ivysaur 4-4-8
3. TSA Beginner Powerlifting Program

Best Olympic Weightlifting Programs

1. Glenn Pendlay Beginner Program
2. Glenn Pendlay Intermediate Program

Best Hypertrophy Programs

1. Joe Delaney Ibiza Shreds Upper/Lower
2. Lyle McDonald Bulking Routine
3. PHAT

Peaking for a meet

Here are some additional programs that are worth checking out if you're preparing for a powerlifting meet.

Best Beginner Peaking Programs

1. PRs on the Platform Beginner
2. Squats & Science Beginner
3. Sheiko Beginner
4. TSA Beginner

Best Intermediate Peaking Programs

1. PRs on the Platform Intermediate (15 Week)
2. Sheiko Intermediate
3. Calgary Barbell 8 & 16 Week
4. TSA Intermediate (9 Week)
5. Candito 6 Week for Squats

Best Advanced Peaking Programs

1. Squats & Science Advanced (14 Week)
2. Calgary Barbell 8 & 16 Week
3. Sheiko Advanced

This list is not exhaustive, but you can't go wrong with it!

03

Lift Vault Method

Novice to advanced using only free programs from this site

Lift Vault Method

If someone wanted to exclusively use programs available on Lift Vault to advance from a novice to advanced lifter, here's what I would recommend.

These are programs that can be run repeatedly, so you can keep running them until progress stops. Programs *exclusively* for peaking are excluded for this reason.

NOVICE PHASE

1. Greyskull LP (strength)
2. PRs on the Platform Beginner (powerlifting base or peaking)

EARLY INTERMEDIATE PHASE

1. nSuns (strength)
2. GZCLP (strength)
3. PRs on the Platform Intermediate (powerlifting base or peaking)

LATE INTERMEDIATE PHASE

1. 5/3/1 with Boring But Big (strength)
2. Nuckols 28 Programs (powerlifting base)
3. Bullmastiff (strength, base then peak)

ADVANCED PHASE

1. Sheiko Advanced (powerlifting base or peaking)
2. Nuckols 28 Programs (powerlifting base)

Appendix: Calculators

Three calculators worth knowing about before you start any program in this guide.

Lift Vault has a bunch of calculators built into the site now. Most of them are for meet day and plate math rather than for running a program, so they're tucked back here. The three that matter for this guide:

- **5/3/1 Calculator**. Builds any 5/3/1 variant off your maxes and sets the training max at 90% for you. If you're running #1 on this list, use it.
- **One Rep Max Calculator**. Every spreadsheet in this guide takes a 1RM as its input. If you haven't tested one recently, estimate it here from a hard set of 3 to 5 reps rather than guessing high.
- **Meet Attempt Planner**. Plans your openers, second and third attempts from your training numbers. If you're running one of the peaking programs in this guide, this is how you turn the last week into a game plan for meet day.

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Ranking based on September 2025 to August 2026.