

VOL. 2 ISSUE 1 · FEB 2024

UGPG ECHO

Official Newsletter of the Utah Giant
Pumpkin Growers



What will 2024 bring?

In 2023 the world record returned to North America and to an outdoor patch. This, after most thought that only greenhouse growers could compete.

2023 also saw the UGPG initiate two new weighoffs with great success, and new life for the club with new growers showing up in... Idaho!

Our challenge? Grow something unbelievable in 2024.



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Opportunities for Giant Veggie Growers

BY CLIFF WARREN

Are you excited for 2024? Let's make some plans! The seed auction is set for February 23rd in the bigpumpkins.com chat room. You are the key to a great auction. Club members who bid are a great help to an exciting auction while raising funds for club events. Speaking of club events, don't miss the spring meeting, 10am March 23rd at Mountain Valley Seed, 175 W 2700 S Salt Lake.



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UGPG Sponsored Weighoffs

Logan Center Street Weighoff - September 28, 2024

The inaugural Logan weighoff in 2023 was a huge success. This is our premier event. Plan now to attend with something big in tow.

GPC sanctioned: Yes

The Gateway in Salt Lake City - Date TBD

Do you look good in orange? The orange jacket is a unique tradition already and awarded to the winner. (An orange jacket is a once in a lifetime opportunity!)

GPC sanctioned: Yes

Winter YouTube

SOME OF OUR FAVORITE VIDEOS FROM YOUTUBE:

Matt McConkie, "Advanced Technique" - By Trueleafmarket - Review Matt's advice to focus on the "big rocks", great information.

Any video by Chris Brown, channel name: Garden of Giants - Chris Brown is a thinker and gets down to the details that experts want to know.

Channel: Growing Giants with Scott - Scott Bayuk shows us how he grows them.

Channel: Cindy Tobeck - Nobody can argue with Cindy's success. Follow her channel for advanced technique, and to see the dedication that giant pumpkins require. Some basic information here also.

Bubba Clementz: A reminder to have some fun while you're doing this!

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITES? POST THEM TO OUR FACEBOOK PAGE.



Area Weighoffs

Wyoming State Championship Weigh Off and Pumpkin Drop - October 5, 2024

Run by club member Jay Richard, this weighoff has had a generous prize structure, with payouts to the top-10. Jay says, "At our weigh off we plan to again have the October fest and huge vendor show. We have a 175 foot crane and do some pumpkin smashing. It's a good time!" You get a pumpkin drop on the same day! Two events in one!

Location: Worland, WY

GPC sanctioned: Yes

Other events

Eastern Idaho State Fair - Bring fruit in August 28, 2024

Other events might reach hundreds or a few thousand people. Attending a state fair might reach 150 to 200 thousand visitors. The EISF has long suffered through a very weak prize structure and a loose set of rules. Cliff is working with new managers to raise the purse (\$500 to the winner) and perhaps even turn it into an event. (Currently you just bring it in, get a weight, and find out later if you won.) Also, working on GPC sanctioning, but as of this writing it's not there. This is an event for Idaho growers.

Location: Blackfoot, ID

GPC sanctioned: No

Ammon City Pumpkin Walk - Tentative October 26, 2024

Last season Ammon city (near Idaho Falls) put up \$700 for first place, and generous amounts for the runner-up giants. They seem very interested in keeping this going, and club members are working with them to establish rules (sound fruit, standardized judging and weighing procedures).

GPC sanctioned: No

Utah State Fair - Fair begins September 5th (check details)

OK, this has long been thought of as a joke among serious giant pumpkin growers. But rumor has it that the event wants to be better. If they're going to get there, club members would need to get involved and help. This event is for Utah growers.

GPC sanctioned: No

As club members, our influence is huge. We are the experts. Last year I grew four plants and had all sorts of issues with frost in late June and overall cold. None of my pollinations were even known. So cold that flowers didn't open until well after I left for work (instead of the usual 6am). In the end I struggled to grow four pumpkins, and all four went to separate events. But I placed in all four events. My point being, grow those pumpkins, there are a lot of opportunities to show them off!



Looking for a goal? Try GOTY.

BY CLIFF WARREN

The Grower of the Year (GOTY) is a GPC sponsored competition for giant vegetable growers. Think of it as the decathlon of giant growing. Ok, maybe a pentathlon.

Growers can qualify for the award by earning points in five of the eight possible categories: giant pumpkin, giant squash, tomato, field pumpkin, marrow, watermelon, long gourd, and bushel gourd. Each of the items entered must be at a GPC sanctioned event. I know what you're thinking... "I'm not half as good as the winner in any category!" But that really doesn't matter. Simply qualifying for the GOTY (by getting to the scale with five qualifying items) is an accomplishment in itself. I'm currently not aware of any club member who has qualified, and yet several of us are very close.

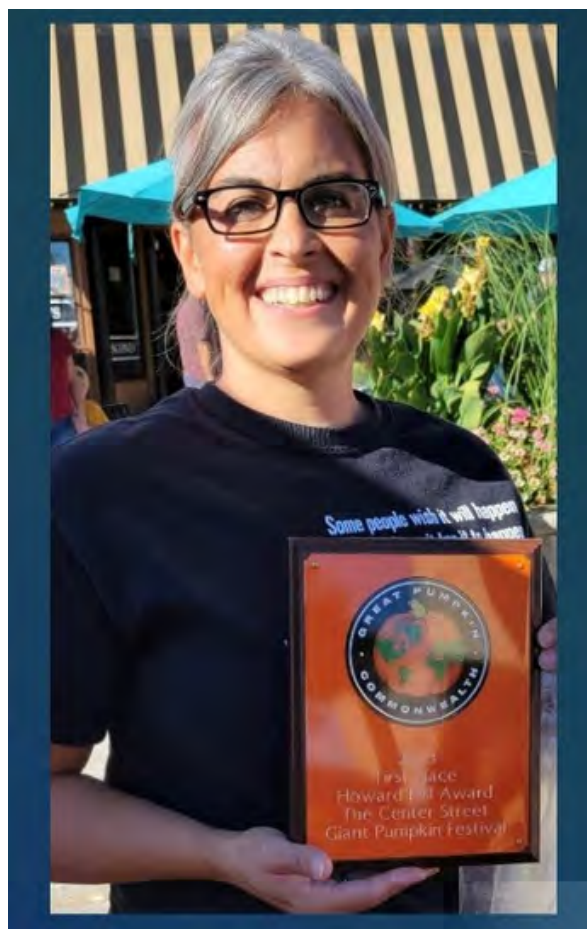
For more information on rules, check with the GPC at gpc1.org.

Holly's Top Tips for First Year Growers

BY HOLLY SHUCK

Facing the First Fact: There is a lot of information to be had whether it be solid giant pumpkin grower's advice or "what worked for me" from the guy next door; a person can get neck deep in giant growing advice, quickly. While my top tips add to the immense sea of advice, I encourage you to check them out, as they are the reason I had a successful season but even more so, these top tips are the reason I am going to be growing giants for years to come.

Top Tip 1: Find a Mentor...and find him/her before the season starts. I found this to be the most important tool in the giant growing toolbox. I have found for at least the first year (probably many years) a mentor is integral to a successful season. They will have been growing for years, will have seen most everything, and if they are local, know better than anyone what works for your area. Prior to finding my mentor I made some poor choices that, in the end, kept me from advancing further than I did. After finding someone who was willing to be the receiver of a frantic email or two, thank you Cliff, I found myself on the award-winning end of giant pumpkin growing.





Top Tip 2: Find a Club – Finding and joining a local giant grower’s club is beneficial to both you and them. I got reliable advice when I needed it and <bonus> it was relevant to my geographical area. The club gained some of my award-winning pumpkin seeds for auction (important for fundraising). My local club was an amazing source for getting plugged into contests and fun activities and I am the club’s new source for newsletter goodies <wink>... and these are just scratching the surface of a club’s benefits.

Top Tip 3: Research, Read, Review – More than likely, your mentor will point you toward some You Tube videos, Facebook pages, and articles that will be wealth of information to you. I suggest you watch, scroll, and read through them all. You will likely need parts and pieces of this information at some point in your giant journey. Also, it’s likely you’ll have a moment where you need advice now and a lot of those giant growing communities are full of people who are happy to give assistance at all hours of the day.

Top Tip 4: Make a goal (even if it’s small), meet this goal, and make and meet a new goal, repeat- My very first goal was to germinate this fantastic giant pumpkin seed I had acquired. It was my goal making that kept me going when my plant was severely damaged by a mid-June frost. I almost gave up but was committed to growing a pumpkin...any pumpkin...of any size. My final goal was to exceed the 500 pound mark...and I met that too.

Top Tip 5: Don’t Get Overwhelmed – There is a lot of information, and a person could get overwhelmed. Stick to what you know you can do and what your personal goals are. As for anything that goes sideways in your project, and something will, take a deep breath and see tips 1-4. If I did it, you can too.

Pure Pollinations

BY CLIFF WARREN

Those of us who are older than the dirt in our patches (literally) might remember the Mallorn pumpkin email list. This was before social media, and even before the bigpumpkins site. For you youngsters, back in the day if you wanted to communicate with a big group of people, an email list was organized and conversations went on an on. If you wanted to say something or ask a question, simply send an email to the entire list. I would get 10 to 20 emails a day like this, and enjoy all of it.

Why am I bringing this up in an article on pure pollinations? I think that was the last time when every giant pumpkin grower in North America (Europe and Asia hadn’t even started this hobby) was communicating all together on all of the important topics. One of these topics is, “How to create a pure pollination.”

When I bring this up, I’m pointing the finger back at myself. If we don’t follow the principles outlined here, we should be marking our pollinations as OPEN.

First, an example. Lately I’ve been interested in growing Boston Marrow in my garden. As food value, most believe that they are better than regular cucurbita pepo for recipes. They are cucurbita maxima, like our giant pumpkins and probably some other squashes I grow. A few years ago I was in a social media chat where the topic came up, and soon I had someone offer to send me some Boston Marrow seeds.

I planted one in 2022 and then things got away from me that year. I ended up with one beautiful Boston Marrow. But I saved seeds from that. Strangely there were only about 25 seeds. This past season in 2023 I planted a row of them. (Continued next page, see photos.)



Ok, the good news here is that I was mighty proud of the beautiful Boston Marrow I grew in the left photo. The bad news is, that of the 12 decently large fruits I grew, 10 of them were this faded pink color. Somewhere along the line, whether it was in the seeds I was given or more likely the uncontrolled pollination the year before, my Boston Marrow seeds were corrupted.

To make a pure pollination, both male and female flowers must be protected at all times, both before the flowers open and for up to 24 hours after on the female. The females must be covered the night before, then covered again immediately after hand pollination. The males must also be selected and covered the night before, but on the males you have the option of harvesting them the night before and keeping them inside in a small vase. I've never done that with the males, but this season I might give it a try. One concern I have is that the males will be fully open indoors, while the females are usually late for me. With cool nights I am usually out there before the flowers open! At 6am most growers have their flowers open, but not me. Last year it was so cold during pollination that I needed to be at work before the flowers open. In that case I will sometimes pry them open and hope that it took.

But back to the fundamentals, the flowers need to be covered before and after. This year I plan to create a "pollination kit" which has everything I need, from coverings, to markers, all ready to go. Some growers use a plastic bag to cover. I worry about the heat and humidity that will create. I'll find some super light fabric to use. Good luck and make some pure pollinations in 2024!

A Guide to Giant Pumpkin Patch Preparation

BY CHATGPT - THERE IS A FIRST AND A LAST TIME FOR EVERYTHING!

The following is Dry, Boring, Basic, and was created in about 10 seconds. Enjoy!

Giant pumpkins are not only a symbol of the fall season but also a fascinating horticultural challenge for enthusiasts looking to grow massive specimens. Creating a successful giant pumpkin patch requires careful planning, attention to detail, and a bit of horticultural know-how. In this article, we will provide a comprehensive guide to preparing a giant pumpkin patch that yields impressive results.

1. **Selecting the Right Location:** Choosing the optimal location is crucial for the success of your giant pumpkin patch. Look for a spot that receives full sunlight, as pumpkins thrive in well-lit areas. Ensure the soil is well-drained and nutrient-rich, with a slightly acidic to neutral pH level. Adequate space for vines to spread is essential, so consider the sprawling nature of giant pumpkin plants.
2. **Soil Preparation:** Giant pumpkins demand nutrient-dense soil for optimal growth. Start by conducting a soil test to determine the existing nutrient levels and pH. Amend the soil with organic matter, such as well-rotted compost or aged manure, to improve fertility and structure. Incorporate a balanced fertilizer, paying attention to the specific needs of pumpkins for essential nutrients like nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium.
3. **Seed Selection:** Choosing the right pumpkin seeds is a critical step in achieving giant pumpkins. Look for seeds specifically bred for size, often labeled as "giant" or "Atlantic Giant" pumpkins. Purchase seeds from reputable suppliers to ensure quality genetics. Consider factors like disease resistance and the pumpkin's growth potential when making your selection.
4. **Starting Seeds Indoors:** Begin the pumpkin growing process indoors several weeks before the last expected frost. Plant seeds in biodegradable pots filled with a high-quality seed-starting mix. Maintain a warm and humid environment for germination. Once seedlings have developed a few true leaves, transplant them carefully into larger containers.
5. **Transplanting Seedlings:** As the danger of frost passes and seedlings grow stronger, it's time to transplant them into the prepared pumpkin patch. Space plants at least 15 feet apart to allow for adequate spreading. Create small hills for planting, which helps with drainage and encourages root development. Water the seedlings thoroughly after transplanting.
6. **Mulching and Irrigation:** Apply a layer of organic mulch around the pumpkin plants to retain soil moisture, suppress weeds, and regulate temperature. Pumpkins require consistent watering, and it's essential to keep the soil consistently moist but not waterlogged. Drip irrigation systems or soaker hoses can be efficient methods to ensure proper hydration.
7. **Pruning and Training Vines:** To encourage larger pumpkins and manage plant energy, consider pruning and training vines. Remove excess side shoots and trim secondary vines, allowing the plant to focus on producing one or two giant pumpkins. Use soft ties to gently train vines to the desired direction, preventing overcrowding.

- **Pest and Disease Management:** Regularly inspect plants for signs of pests and diseases. Common pumpkin pests include aphids, squash bugs, and cucumber beetles. Employ organic pest control methods such as neem oil or insecticidal soap to keep pests at bay. Fungal diseases can be prevented through proper spacing, good air circulation, and applying fungicides as a preventive measure.
- **Feeding and Fertilizing:** As giant pumpkins grow, they require a consistent supply of nutrients. Feed the plants with a balanced, slow-release fertilizer throughout the growing season. Adjust nutrient levels based on soil tests and plant needs. Supplemental foliar feeding can be beneficial for providing an immediate nutrient boost.
- **Harvesting and Enjoying the Fruits of Your Labor:** Harvest giant pumpkins when they reach their peak size and color. Cut the stem carefully, leaving a few inches attached to the pumpkin. Handle the pumpkins with care to avoid damage. Once harvested, giant pumpkins can be showcased at fall festivals, entered into contests, or simply admired in your own backyard.

Conclusion: Growing a giant pumpkin patch is a rewarding endeavor that requires dedication, careful planning, and a green thumb. By selecting the right location, preparing the soil, choosing quality seeds, and implementing proper care practices, you'll be on your way to cultivating impressive giant pumpkins that are sure to be the highlight of the fall season. Remember to enjoy the process and the sense of accomplishment that comes with successfully nurturing these colossal fruits. Happy gardening!

Editor's note: In the patch there is no substitute for human ingenuity, joy, emotion, and love!