GROWING GIANT PUMPKINS !!!

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE FOR THE GIANT PUMPKIN GROWER

by JOHN BARLOW

The WGPG started as a group of giant pumpkin growers in central Wisconsin in 1984, and grew to become a non-profit organization with members across the entire world.

‘Growers Helping Growers’

Wisconsin Giant Pumpkin Growers is a social organization committed to teaching, and sharing of growing information of giant fruits and vegetables in the Wisconsin area. We also work to introduce people to, and provide a means of sharing information and friendship about the art, sport, and challenge of growing giant fruits and vegetables. Our membership of friendly growers, growing events, weigh-offs, meetings, presentations and educational seminars, along with our website, will provide all of the support necessary for large fruit and vegetable growers.

This booklet has been designed to help newer growers learn some of the aspects of growing Giant Pumpkins.

There are many diverse techniques, products, methods and ideas being utilized by Giant Pumpkin Growers. The dream of growing the next record keeps many growing!

Hopefully, this booklet will help you grow a monster!

TOPICS

1.SITE SELECTION

Have plenty of sunshine, with morning sun at a premium.

Very good drainage, with access to water.

600-1000 square feet per plant (30' x 30' common).

Avoid windy areas, or plan to put up windbreaks.

Avoid areas prone to flooding.

Having electricity nearby can be advantageous.

Consider access of machinery to move the Giant!!!

2.SOIL

Loams and sandy soils allow great rooting. Avoid compacted soils.

A soil test is advisable! Adding unnecessary nutrients can cause imbalances, resulting in "locked-up" unavailable nutrients.

Organic matter that has been broken down by composting or hydrolysis contain plant-based nutrients that are readily available.

Organic methods of soil building allow for slow release of nutrients.

In very sandy soils low in organic matter, high-quality water-soluble nutrients may be applied consistently throughout the season.

Soils high in organic matter and teaming with microbial life helps hold moisture and allows for symbiotic relationships between the plant and plant growth promoting rhizobacteria.

Some commonly used organic amendments:

Kelp Meal	**Hydrolyzed Fish**	**Humic Acids**
Alfalfa Meal	**Aged Manures**	**Worm Castings**
Composts	**Molasses**	**Grass Clippings**

Mini-greenhouses (clotches) help warm the soil above 60 degrees and help for plant protection from the elements.

These should be placed several days ahead of time. A heater inside and a blanket covering at night will keep things cozy.

Keep in mind though, on sunny days it can get pretty warm inside, so having a ventilation plan may help prevent overheating.

The use of clotches can allow you to start two-to-three weeks ahead of what mother nature may allow. This gives the plant and the pumpkin more time to grow!

3.SEEDS

Seeds used to grow these World Class Giant Pumpkins descended from the Atlantic Giant seed line developed by Howard Dill. The best seeds are usually obtained through auctions, from the grower directly, or by joining a Giant Pumpkin Growers Club.

The seed usually germinates in 3 or 4 days, so plan accordingly. Be aware of when you will have the plant growing outside. Competitive growers in Wisconsin commonly start the seed in mid-April, and keep inside for 1-3 weeks before transplanting outside.

A seed will germinate best when it has been soaked for a couple of hours before being placed in an environment of about 80 degrees.

**** Tips: Keep emerging plant under sunlight or a strong light for 12-14 hours per day.**
Keep a fan blowing lightly on it.
Start in small pots which lasts 4-6 days.

Up-potting to a 4-to-5 gallon pail can last for 3 weeks or so.

Pail is upside down with bottom cut out, thus it can be easily removed without disturbing the roots!

4.TRANSPLANTING

Transplant on a nice day in the evening. Add any Plant Growth Promoting Rhizobacteria and Mycorrhizae and/or slow release nutrients at this time. Water in well.

Plant will commonly lay down the opposite direction of the first true leaf. Leaning it in the direction you want it to go may help. Stakes can be used to control the vine's direction.

When replacing the soil around the transplant, create a circular berm with it that will help "hold" future watering at the plant's base. Try to keep the leaves off of the soil.

5. PLANT CARE

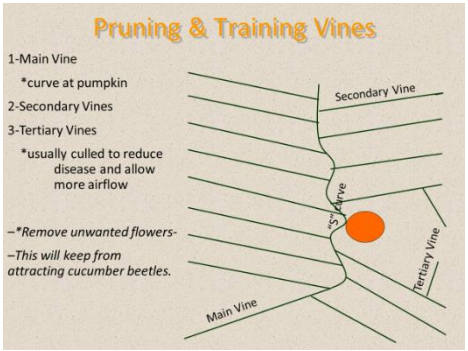
Diseases should be prevented if at all possible. Keeping things clean, providing good airflow, providing a well-balanced nutrient diet, protect plant from undue stresses and using a planned fungicide and insecticide regimen will help.

Insects common to Wisconsin:

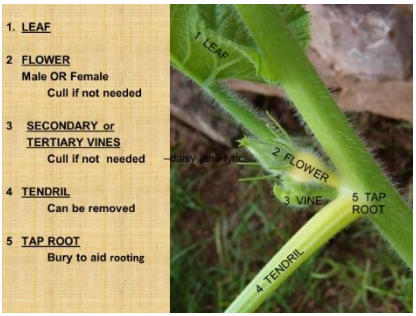
1. **Squash Vine Borer (moth shown)**
2. **Cucumber Beetle**
3. **Squash Bug (shown by its eggs)**

There are various methods to control these and other pests. To control the Squash Vine Borer, make sure any product you use has it listed. Products should be applied according to directions in order to break the life-cycle of these damaging insects.

Diseases in the patch can occur on the leaves and roots. Even a healthy plant may need some help fighting the bacterial, fungal and viral infections that can happen. A multi-faceted approach shows better control than using only one product.



Managing the vine helps:
Rooting, and Air Flow
Control Diseases
Control Wind Damage
Utilize space effectively
Help with Weed Control
Get BIGGER PUMPKINS!



Burying the vine can create a lot of root growth which allows the plant to get more nutrients and water. The root also anchors the vine against the wind! Roots may grow at several spots at each leaf junction as long as it is covered from the sun and kept moist. Once roots are established, they can be uncovered if wanted.

**** Tips: Trim one or two of the first few stump vines after other secondaries start rooting to keep stump healthy and to stimulate "boost" the other vines to grow!**
Also, if moving a vine, do so in the heat of the day when its more flexible.

6. WATERING

Water the plant as needed, the soil should be kept moist enough where a person can squeeze a handful of it and see droplets start to form between the fingers. Over watering can risk diseases and leach nutrients from the soil.

When watering overhead do so early enough so plant can dry off before night-time, thus lowering the risk of some diseases.

7. PUMPKIN CARE

The plant has both male and female flowers. Pollination occurs when pollen from the male contacts the female's stigma. The baby pumpkin seen below the female flower should noticeably get larger in 3-4 days if pollination was successful.

Once the pumpkin starts to get bigger the grower needs to plan space for it to grow safely. Create an "S-curve" in the vine will help as the pumpkin grows and pushes out toward the vine. Also, secondary vines may need to be cut or trained out of the way. A really huge pumpkin can be almost 6 feet wide! Sometimes roots on vines need cutting or vines lifted (support vine with blocks) to give slack to the vine.

The pumpkin should be on a flat surface protected from pests underneath. Plywood covered with fiberglass "mill" fabric works well. This also helps if pumpkin should be slid back from the vine.

Shading and covering the fruit with a light-colored sheet helps protect it from extreme heat, scalding and keeps the skin softer. Misting with water on scorching hot days may be wise.

During colder weather a blanket may help keep the pumpkin from getting to cold and stop growing. Be aware of mice and voles seeking warmth, they can chew and damage the fruit.

****Tips: Use bleach for small areas that need to be cleaned up. Use a fan to keep areas dry. Use traps to eliminate ground pests**

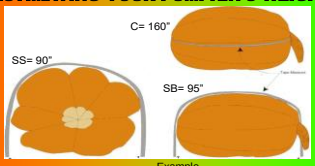
8. Displaying / Moving

Pumpkins that are too big for one person to move require a plan. A tarp or blanket can be used with several helpers. Sometimes a mechanical technique will be needed to lift the pumpkin onto a pallet that can then be moved with a forklift or pallet jack.

A 'lifting ring' may be needed: Straps with loops that hang from a frame are cinched tightly under the pumpkin with a rope.

****Note: All pumpkins taken to a Weigh-Off should be on a pallet.**

ESTIMATING YOUR PUMPKIN'S WEIGHT



- Circumference.
- Stem to blossom.
- Side to side.
- Add together for OTT

Example
C= 160"
SB= 95"
SS= 90"
OTT= 345"

Take the OTT total then check on the chart to get an estimate of the pumpkin's weight

HOW BIG IS IT?

Estimating growth rate and weight can be useful. From assessing the health of the pumpkin to deciding what to do with it can be determined.

OTT	Lbs	OTT	Lbs	OTT	Lbs	OTT	Lbs	OTT	Lbs	OTT	Lbs	OTT	Lbs	OTT	Lbs
160	99	244	335	300	623	330	826	360	1060	390	1320	420	1602	450	1898
165	108	246	343	301	629	331	833	361	1068	391	1329	421	1611	451	1908
170	117	248	352	302	636	332	840	362	1076	392	1338	422	1621	452	1918
175	127	250	360	303	642	333	848	363	1085	393	1347	423	1631	453	1928
180	137	252	369	304	648	334	855	364	1093	394	1357	424	1641	454	1938
185	149	254	378	305	655	335	863	365	1101	395	1366	425	1650	455	1949
190	160	256	387	306	661	336	870	366	1110	396	1375	426	1660	456	1959
195	173	258	396	307	668	337	878	367	1118	397	1384	427	1670	457	1969
200	186	260	405	308	674	338	885	368	1127	398	1393	428	1680	458	1979
202	191	262	415	309	681	339	893	369	1135	399	1403	429	1689	459	1989
204	197	264	424	310	687	340	900	370	1144	400	1412	430	1699	460	1999
206	203	266	434	311	694	341	908	371	1152	401	1421	431	1709	561	2009
208	208	268	444	312	700	342	916	372	1161	402	1431	432	1719	462	2020
210	214	270	454	313	707	343	923	373	1170	403	1440	433	1729	463	2030
212	220	272	464	314	714	344	931	374	1178	404	1449	434	1739	464	2040
214	227	274	475	315	720	345	939	375	1187	405	1459	435	1748	465	2050
216	233	276	485	316	727	346	947	376	1196	406	1468	436	1758	466	2060
218	239	278	496	317	734	347	955	377	1204	407	1478	437	1768	467	2070
220	246	280	507	318	741	348	963	378	1213	408	1487	438	1778	468	2081
222	253	282	518	319	748	349	970	379	1222	409	1496	439	1788	469	2091
224	259	284	529	320	755	350	978	380	1231	410	1506	440	1798	470	2101
226	266	286	540	321	762	351	986	381	1240	411	1515	441	1808	471	2111
228	273	288	552	322	769	352	994	382	1248	412	1525	442	1818	472	2122
230	281	290	563	323	776	353	1002	383	1257	413	1535	443	1828	473	2132
232	288	292	575	324	783	354	1011	384	1266	414	1544	444	1838	474	2142
234	295	294	587	325	790	355	1019	385	1275	415	1554	445	1848	475	2152
236	303	296	599	326	797	356	1027	386	1284	416	1563	446	1858	476	2163
238	311	297	605	327	804	357	1035	387	1293	417	1573	447	1868	477	2173
240	319	298	611	328	811	358	1043	388	1302	418	1582	448	1878	478	2183
242	327	299	617	329	819	359	1051	389	1311	419	1592	449	1888	479	2193

What can go wrong?

The entire effort could be for naught for many reasons.

The weather has a lot to do with success. Trying to block the wind is vitally important. Training vines and keeping weeds under control will at least give one a chance.

Pollination success and aborting pumpkins are related to temperatures extremes which can be a challenge to control. Shading, misting, placing ice nearby can help keep things cool. Do not however block all light from a recent pollination, some light is crucial for early development.

Vines, stems and pumpkins may split, just do your best to prevent them. Check for stem stress (tautness) often and relieve the tightness. Avoid drought-like conditions because a sudden heavy rain can cause pumpkins to swell and crack.

Small damage spots might enlarge to become problem rot areas. Commonly the area is cleaned to good tissue (scraping away a bit of rot may be necessary) spray with a bleach solution and keep dry with a fan.

Woodchucks, deer, rats, rabbits, mice and voles are known to cause damage. Fencing and trapping are common control measures.

Neighbor's use of herbicides has been known to end a grower's season. Insist that they spray only on calm days, or when the wind is blowing away from your patch.

It is advisable to start more plants than you plan to keep and cull away plants as the season progresses.

TIME TO REFLECT

What does it take to grow a giant pumpkin? It's a combination of good weather, soil, seed, knowledge, technique and of course a little bit of good luck! Competitive growers spend hours in the patch trying to maximize the plant's potential. Learning is ongoing as the agricultural industry is always researching how to get the most out of their harvests. GOOD LUCK & GROW BIG!

WISCONSIN GIANT PUMPKIN GROWERS

wisconsingiantpumpkingrowers.com

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

Newsletters	Club Competitions
Club Awards & Prizes	Invitations to Club Events
Patch Tours	Spring Meeting
Seed Distribution	Spring Seminar
Seed Auction	Winter Meeting
Product Discounts	Free or Reduced Entry Fees
Club Weigh-Offs	Networking

WISCONSIN WEIGH-OFFS

Cedarburg Wine and Harvest Festival
Kenosha Giant Pumpkin Weigh-Off
Nekoosa Giant Pumpkin Fest
Mischicot Pumpkin Fest
Green Bay Giant Pumpkin Weigh-Off

For current info:
wisconsingiantpumpkingrowers.com

Fee is: ***$30 In the U.S.*** ***$40 Outside U.S.***

Make payment out to WGPG and mail with Member Contact Information to:

WGPG Membership
48631 Somerville Dr.
Gays Mills, WI 54631

Memberships run from January 1st through December 31st
Join by June 1st to be eligible for club competitions, awards and prizes
Seeds will only be distributed to Members joined by April 1st
Contact us at wgpg@mwt.net with questions and of any changes in contact info.

Circle your choices:

1. Method for receiving newsletters and other mailings -	email	postal
2. Seed distribution -	yes	no thanks
3. Willing to volunteer at club functions or weigh-offs -	yes	no
4. Sharing of contact info with other members (newsletter) -	yes	no

Member Contact Information

Name_____ Household Members:_____

Address_____ Comments:_____

_____

Email_____

Phone_____ Amount Enclosed:_____

Signature:_____ Date:_____

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48631 Somerville Drive
Gays Mills, WI 54631

wgpg@mwt.net
wisconsingiantpumpkingrowers.com

GROWERS HELPING GROWERS

THANK-YOU SUPPORTERS !

Ohio Earth Foods
www.ohioearthfood.com
608-489-3600

AgriEnergy Resources
www.agrienergy.net
815-872-1190

Green Gro Biologicals
www.thegreengro.com
707-838-2084

Wallace Organic Wonders
wallacewow.com
414-864-7747

Paradigm Gardens
www.paradigmgardens.com
608-241-3800

DRAMM
www.dramm.com
920-684-0227

CARLIN Horticultural
www.carlinsales.com
800-657-0745

Holland's Land 'O Giants
www.hollandsgiants.com
253-840-3575

Site One Landscape Supply
www.siteone.com
608-831-3240

Worldwide Giant Growers
worldwidegiantgrowers.com
248-818-0104