



## UGPG Newsletter, Summer 2023

.....

### Summer in full swing!

You may have noticed huge changes to the schedule. New weighoffs in Logan and Salt Lake City. (Hint: This was implied in “Rumor Mill” in the April issue!) Get ready for summer patch tours. Exciting times for club members! We hope your summer find you well and your patch humming with big pumpkins on the vine!

### Mark your calendars!

Aug 12 - Patch Tour

Sept 23 - Logan Center Street Weigh Off

Oct 7 - Gateway SLC Weigh Off

Oct 14 - Regatta at Daybreak

Oct 28 - Pumpkin Drop/End of Year Party at Hee Haw Farms

Nov 23 - Feast with a Beast at Hogle Zoo

.....

THIS EDITION'S  
TOP STORIES

Summer series: In the patch with...

The main focus of our summer issue is to catch up with club members, right in their patch. Whether you are a veteran or a beginning grower we hope to feature you in an upcoming issue. Without further ado...

## In the patch with Ken Kolb

I have always enjoyed growing plants, maybe that's why I have a BS in Horticulture and a minor in Botany. I started growing Atlantic Giant pumpkins in 2008 after watching "Lords of the Gourd" in the winter of 2007. I found a grower in Idaho, Brian Christensen and sent him a request for seeds. I still have a couple that I keep as sentimental value. That first year I grew a 472.5 lb pumpkin and I was hooked. Watching the pumpkin grow was amazing to me.



The next couple of years my pumpkins died because of squash bugs. I was able to get a small one to the scale in 2011, 137 lb. The next 2 years I tried to grow too many 3 in the space for 1 plant, not much success. But then in 2014 I grew a 972.5 lb and 717 lb pumpkin and got 5th place at the Thanksgiving Point weighoff. 2015 was my best year growing with an 1188.5 lb pumpkin 3rd place at TGP. 2016 990 lb 3rd place TGP. 2017 I took the year off growing pumpkins and grew a Market Garden were the patch was but missed the pumpkins too much.

2018 1060 lb and 4th place TGP, 2019 660 6th place TGP. In 2020 I added a 2nd patch and grew 2 pumpkins 875.5 lb 11th place TGP and 1098.5 lb 2nd place Hee Haw farms, 2021 872 lb 10th place Hee Haw farms.

2022 was not a good year. 75 pounds and last place. I was diagnosed with Prostate cancer and I kinda lost interest, but this year everything looks good after radiation treatment and so do the plants.

I also grow long gourds and have placed either 1st or 2nd at every weigh off with my PB 115.5”.

I currently grow in 2 patches both around 600 square feet. I have a limited budget and don't spend much on seeds. I let other club members do that then grow their seeds the next few years, we have gracious people in the club that get world class genetics that give back to the members. Is there any other club in the world that has such a diverse membership? We have doctors, accountants, realtors, postal workers, hvac technicians, computer engineers, engineers and many different people that just love pumpkins. The plants that I have growing this year are 1905 Sadiq and 1404 Bradley. They have great genes and you can't go wrong with any of the seeds in the club packets when you join. Goals for this year are 1) get 2 pumpkins to the scale 2) don't let the weeds overtake the patches like they have in the past. If I can do this I should have a good year.

My philosophy is to have fun and grow the biggest pumpkin I can. I don't have thousands of dollars to put up a greenhouse or spend thousands on fertilizer. I am just a backyard gardener who likes to play in the dirt. I feed them compost tea once or twice a week and fertilize with seaweed, gypsum, milorganite and sulfur when burying the vines. I also spray them with Ureamate 3x/week. Some of my motivation this year is that I bought a 1964 VW Karmann Ghia that I need money to restore. At the end of the year I have taken pumpkins to the zoo, to my work for displays and my favorite thing is to drop them on cars. I have met some incredible people growing pumpkins and somehow pumpkins bring smiles to everyone's faces.







## In the patch with Cliff Warren

Back in the year 2000, my sister went to the local library and found a book, “How to Grow World Class Giant Pumpkins”, by Don Langevin. She checked it out and handed it to me. That turned out to be a big deal. I have officially tried to grow giants every year since 2000, never taking a year off. I also seem to be the world’s slowest learner.



The biggest factor I've found in all the years doing this has turned out to be shade cloth. I never thought I needed it, but I finally started using it in the last few years. After a few hiccups I finally got over that 1000 pound mark. Our weather up here is COLD, except for five or six weeks in the middle of summer where every day is around 95 F and very dry. In fact we go from the mid-50's to the mid-90's every day, and taking the averages of everything, it's a 37 degree temperature swing from early morning to late afternoon, every day during that time. Without shade your poor plant won't have the juice to put in the pumpkin. It just tries to survive.

I pick seeds based on their color potential. I have 5 HD award wins, (and a few more that should have been). (JUST KIDDING!) This year I'm growing the 1977 Rea, 2069 and 2243 Stelts, and my own 500 in its 10th year. Best club finish was 992 for second place, the same year that Matt went 1974, almost double. Best overall weight, 1112 last year. That happened to be the first year that I got a "shaded" pumpkin to weighoff, as the year previous the pumpkin under shade grew too fast and split on me. Now I have resources to grow four plants under shade.

My approach to this is to take it easy and have fun. I'm an overall gardener and yardener in addition to the giants. Even with that attitude the setbacks are hard to deal with. This year we froze, somewhat unexpectedly, on June 22nd. I used every bit of protection we had on the "actual food" plants and ended up losing two main vines and a bunch of leaves. In fact, those mains were covered, but during the night they stretched out and grew outside the cover, then froze! I've seen it all. Next on the agenda is to purchase massive tarps and be able to cover no matter what stage of the season we're in. (Note to self: shade cloths do NOT protect plants in a light frost!) Like I say, World's slowest learner. But I do love the journey, and the people I meet who are in this pursuit.





## In the patch with DJ Steffler

After showing up to a weighoff for the first time in 2016, DJ's personal best is 1,400 lbs (and the Idaho state record) grown in 2017. "I placed 2nd in the Hee Haws with this one. It's tough to beat McConkie at a weight off, even if it's his 2nd pumpkin." "My next best weight was 1167.5 in 2020."



DJ grows in a 600 square foot greenhouse, and is space limited to one pumpkin per year. (Editor's note: I have the utmost respect for anyone who can only have one pumpkin per year. I might even try it sometime.)

DJ on seeds: "This year I started with the 2,560 Geinger (Maverick), 1989.5 (Conway), 2234 Noel, 2287 Sadiq. I was after some 1885 Werner genetics, and Tanner Conway's pumpkin was 19% heavy – which would be a miracle in my patch. I ended up with the 1989.5 this year after the main cracked on the Maverick as it was laying down. I'm very happy with the plant."

What are some things you've found important in this pursuit: "The greenhouse is nice. The biggest things are not over amending the soil (I'm guilty!), correct watering, shade cloth. Here's some good advice – please overspend on some amazing seeds from our club auction. I'm going broke and can't plant them all anyway. Another important aspect is to have some fun with it. There are lots of other more important things that need to be done that maybe aren't as much fun as growing a pumpkin.

I'd love to grow a bigger pumpkin every year, but that hasn't happened at all! My goal is to improve and simplify."

DJ did an ASD treatment and planted some buckwheat afterwards. ASD stands for Anaerobic Soil Disinfestation. "I think it's a great method that improves many things that we are / should be doing already – especially cover crops.

My often quoted and misunderstood philosophy is "any worth doing is worth overdoing". I'm the only one in my family who thinks that this is funny. I've tried to dial my enthusiasm and time commitment back a bit from the pumpkin growing. This is key to pumpkin growing longevity for me. I've been enjoying running more this year, which has taken some focus off of the pumpkin also. It's hard to overdo 2 things at the same time. I don't understand what the pumpkin fix does for me, but it uniquely fits or fills some void in my psyche – Maybe? Another good quote is "you can't get enough of what you don't need". I'm not sure how this applies to pumpkin growing, but I've heard it used.



## In The Patch with Ralph Laub

Ralph got his start in giant pumpkin growing by going to a seminar that Lee Perry was hosting on growing Giant Pumpkins a little over a decade ago.

Ralph and his family have always had a garden growing. When their kids moved out they were trying to decide what to do with the garden space. Being just the two of them they didn't need as much of a garden. So after going to a seminar they got themselves a giant pumpkin seed and have been hooked ever since. With two different garden plots they still keep a nice food garden in a 1500 sqft spot with one giant and a few giant watermelons. They grow one other giant pumpkin in a 700 sqft garden. He was telling me how in comparison to growing Giant Pumpkins trying to do giant watermelons is a completely different process.

When asked about unique things Ralph does to try and improve each year Ralph responded by saying how whenever he sees a problem in his patch he tries to fix it but also his "trade secret" is using heat cables in the soil. Similar to ones you would use to melt snow on your

house. He says by firing up the heat cables in early spring and bringing his soil temperature up to around 70-75 degrees it helps young plants thrive better early on and then develop strong healthy roots as it matures. He keeps a thermostat in the ground to help maintain temperature. Ralph really stressed that before you put your plants in the ground your soil needs to be balanced with all the nutrients and the temperature up. He said if you have those two things that your plants will take off early and will be easier to maintain throughout the season.

This year Ralph is using his own genetics (Laub 1514) and crossing it with 1675 Martinzer in hopes of bringing some heavy genetics into the Laub genetic line. Hopefully by doing this we can get Ralph to join the one ton club. He hears they have good hats.

Ralph we're all rooting for you and looking forward to seeing your end results!



## In the patch with Trenton Mason

Trenton is one of our newer growers. It's great seeing him side by side with some of our veteran growers to see some of the tricks and unique things each person does differently.

Trenton is currently using a 40x20 plot at his in-laws house. He's using a couple of seeds from Sadiq and hoping for good results. Trenton is really hoping to be able to break 500lbs this year and 1,000 in the very near future. I would say he's got a pretty high chance of it



this year. He's been asking a lot of questions and doing the research to be able to maximize his seeds the best that he can.

His philosophy for the year is just going all in to do his best but have fun with it. Last winter he built a 20ft tall snowman to have something unique in the neighborhood. He wants to be able to have a giant pumpkin to be his fall neighborhood attraction.

NoHe's currently got two plants growing. One on the north side of his plot and the other on the south end. His family used to have cattle on the land he's growing on so the soil is high in nutrients from the cattle droppings over the years.

Growing in the Heber valley has presented some different challenges for Trenton this year. After the heavy winter he started later than most of us would be. Waiting for snow melt and the soil temperature to warm up to be able to sustain his plants. I think if anybody can navigate it and grow something over 1,000 in the Heber valley it would be Trenton.



### *Editor Notes, by Cliff Warren*

*Are you sharing the Good Word of Giant Pumpkins?*

This isn't easy. Specifically, growing a giant pumpkin is hard. But just having the opportunity is hard. For most of us, unless you're older than me or are an actual farmer, we have room for about 1.5 pumpkins on our property. It also takes a lot out of you. Anyone who can grow only one plant, (or 1.5) I admire your dedication!

I was visiting a friend this week. He admires what we do and has wanted to try it. Well, he has a lot in a newer neighborhood, young family, and as you're well aware, they don't partition lots out like they used to. So, at least for now his lot backs up to an empty lot which someday should house a church. Either weeds can grow there, or something more useful, so he's giving it a shot. But the soil, it's like chalk, or what I had 23 years ago. It's not an easy decision to drop 5 yards of compost on land you don't own.

Each of us is the best giant pumpkin grower in the local area in which we live. And I think all of us are willing and able to help others get involved. I hope we can do something to keep this pursuit alive!

### *Learning from our pioneers, by Andrew Allred*

In light of our Utah pioneer days we often get distracted by the pizzazz. The fireworks, rodeos, parades, and other festivities. Are we remembering our pioneers during all of this though? When we are early growers one of the biggest things we can take advantage of is the knowledge from those who have come before us. In this case, our orange thumb pioneers. Those who have mastered growing big.

This hobby of ours growing giant fruits and vegetables for the fun of it is a unique one. Unlike a lot of common hobbies it comes with a lot of variables and unpredictable factors. You can have the best seed, the best soil, favorable weather, and still something unpredictable can happen to make or break your season. There's a lot to be learned each year for veteran growers and our newer growers. Ralph Laub was telling me how he keeps meticulous notes each growing season. What seeds he is using, any soil amendments he makes before or during the season, the weather everyday, how much water, and the list goes on. By doing this he is able to keep finding ways to improve his season every year the best that he can. Ralph has been doing this for the better part of a decade. Just in talking with him for an hour I was able to expand my knowledge on growing. Clint and Cliff shared similar sentiments with me from their own personal interviews.

From seed hunting to interviewing growers I've found most people are willing to talk about what they do and their success. Let's not forget to take advantage of the knowledge and wisdom that comes from our pioneer growers.



[READ MORE ON OUR WEBSITE](#)