

VOL. 3 ISSUE 1 · JAN 2025

UGPG ECHO

Official Newsletter of the Utah Giant
Pumpkin Growers

Ralph and Juana Laub Take Two!



Ralph and Juana won both Utah weighoffs in 2024, and even went over to Colorado to make noise there too! The 2289 at Logan set a new Utah State record. Congratulations to them!

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Remembering Ross Bowman (1934 - 2025)



Ross will be missed, what a life he lived! What a great all around guy he was! A friend to all. I'm glad for some really fun experiences with him over the years. Being a rocket scientist and being a major part of redesigning the Space Shuttle solid rocket motors and resumption of Space Shuttle flights wasn't enough.... He became the first person in Utah to grow a 2000 lb pumpkin - at the age of 86! - Clint Nash

Ross is the gardener that we all dream of becoming. No matter what time of year, if it was March the pansies were up and in a perfect row, and everything was pruned and ready for a new season. Whenever we were passing through his town we would ask ourselves if we had time to go peek at Ross' garden, knowing full well that if we were spotted we would be invited to visit and take a tour. Giant pumpkin club members will always remember his dominant 2021 season, as well as the patch tours where breakfast was served at his home. In this photo he wears a NASA hat. He was actually a rocket scientist by day and a gardener all of the time as well. - Cliff Warren

One of the most influential friends in my life. Ross left no opportunity untested. His passion for life and experiences drives people today and will tomorrow. Legends never die. - Kyle Fox



Ross Bowman

After a successful career as a rocket scientist, Ross turned his focus to giant pumpkins. After retirement, he wanted to bring smiles to the faces of those in town by growing giant pumpkins in his garden. That he did! Ross was the first grower to bring 3 separate 1000 lb pumpkins to a single weigh off. He went on to win 2 weigh offs and was the first grower in Utah to top the 2000 lb mark. At the age of 86 Ross brought 3 pumpkins to the Hee Haw Farms weigh off totaling 5859 lbs, including the new state record of 2142 lbs. He also won the 2012 ginormous pumpkin regatta. Ross is respected as a great person and a friend to UGPG growers far and wide.



Remembering Jim West

BY CLIFF WARREN

Our good friend and club member Jim West died shortly before the weighoff season began. Jim will be remembered for his warm personality and dedication to the hobby. Anyone traveling from Hamilton Montana is certainly dedicated!



Jim wow'ed us one last time at the Gateway where his 138 inch long gourd set a club record! Members of his family attended and brought his pumpkin and long gourd on his behalf.



2025 Calendar of Events

What	Where	When
Seed Auction	BigPumpkins.com	February 7, 6pm
GPC World Conference	Green Bay, Wisconsin	March 7-8
Cache Valley Garden Show	Contact Mark Anderson for details	March 22
Club Spring Meeting, Lunch!	Trueleaf Market Warehouse, 175 W 2700 S, SLC	March 29, 9am
Eastern Idaho State Fair	Blackfoot Idaho	Fruits weighed August 27, then on display for 10 days
Utah State Fair	SLC, Fairgrounds	September 3 or TBD
Center Street Weighoff	Logan	September 27, all day
Wyoming Weighoff	Worland, WY	October 4th,
Gateway Weighoff	SLC, Gateway Mall	October 11
Regatta	SLC, Daybreak	October 18 or TBD
The Drop!	Hee Haw Farms, Pleasant Grove	October 25



Voices From the Club

By Jim Seamons

From a grower and a commercial point of view, a quick crash course:

What is your goal? 300, 500, 1,000 or 2,000

As a grower regardless how big you want to grow you need to establish what you want to accomplish first. If you want to grow for a porch pumpkin that is still moveable with a little help, or perhaps you want to be able to row in the regatta. Both require dedication and resources but far less than if you want to grow a new state record or world record. My target as a commercial grower are pumpkins 400-800 pounds. Why? They are easier to move around and ship than larger pumpkins, and they fit in the space of one standard pallet. As well for professional carvers carving at a LIVE event, pumpkins more than 800 pounds are too much pumpkin to deal with in the allotted time frame. Key points I focus on: Starting Dates, May 1st is the deadline to have seeds started and in at least a two-gallon pot.

(cont.)



Why? Any later they don't develop in time and any earlier I don't have the means to slow plant growth in the pots while I wait for the soil to warm up. Two-gallon pots give them a little room in case I can't get them in the ground because of weather. My target is May 18th to June 1st to have them in the soil.

They need babying, I use 15-18 inch pipe as a cloche, 12- 18" tall to put around the plants till the weather warms up enough to support daily growth and they add a little warmth. I also cover each plant at night until the pots come off. 400 throw blankets are always available.

Bugs from day one. Seven is effective at first but then you need to move into a rotation of weekly bug control. Identify what is in your area and potential problems. You call me and say you have a squash bug; it's Monday and you decide to deal with it the following Saturday then you are making the decision to end your season. Don't mess around, I'm out daily checking for problems on 200 plus plants along with the other 8 acres of pumpkins.

Healthy plants produce healthy pumpkins. Mycos and compost tea. Look into the biological effect. We use compost tea on our alfalfa/grass as well pumpkins. The benefits outweigh the cost and it is easy to produce. If you don't want to make your own then reach out to local gardening centers. Many produce fresh batches weekly. We do batches weekly for pumpkins and bi-weekly for Hay.

Fertilizing is where growers tend to back off or not feed sufficiently. Early on you need N, P and K but mainly push the N. It helps grow the lettuce. As you get close to pollinating back off your N use and transition to keeping a little N but push the P and K. As the fruit gets going start upping your K. K helps push the fruit. We inject weekly into the water system through the whole season. As the fruit gets going we spread fresh pelleted potash on the plants up until a week before we start to harvest.

Early August if you see the plants looking tired, don't hesitate to throw down a 20-20-20 fertilizer and give it an extra boost.

Beyond that, cover those pumpkins from early pollination until harvest. Sun causes early maturing and pesky varmints like to nibble.

If you are wanting to grow record breakers, start collecting resources and research everything you can find. There is a lot out there on social media to help you. Look at your own soil and situation and make decisions from there. You can reach out to any grower in the world, most are willing to give tidbits of ideas.



Seed Auction is February 7th, Spring Meeting March 29th

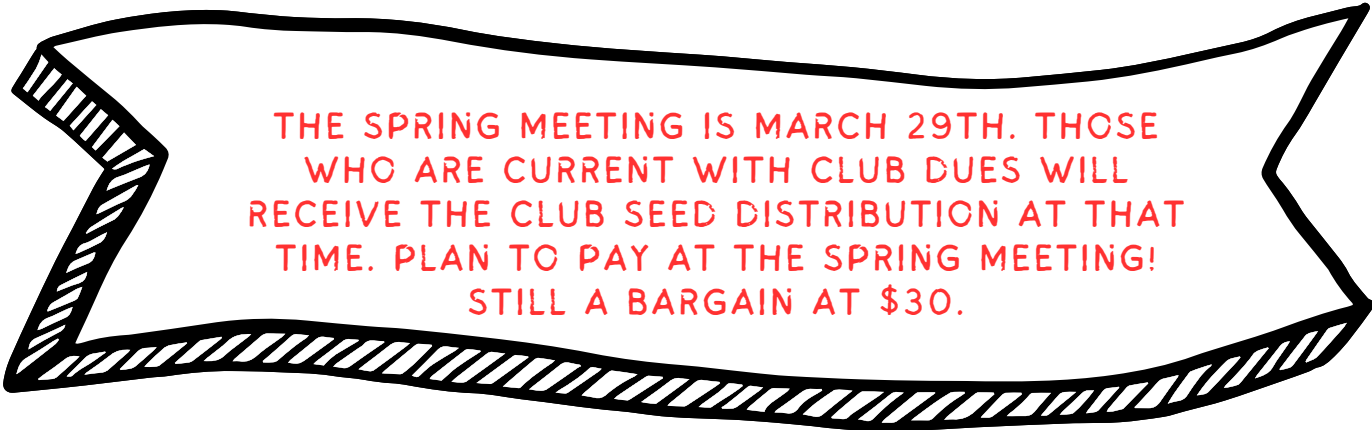
BY CLIFF WARREN

Just in time for that Valentine's gift for that special someone in your life, (or for yourself) the UGPG Seed Auction is set for Friday Feb. 7. This is one of the important fund-raising efforts within the club. This is a good place to get that top seed you want, whether it's giant pumpkins, field pumpkins, giant tomatoes, long gourds, watermelon, and more.

To participate, you first need a free account on BigPumpkins.com.

Go to the site just before 6pm on February 7th. On the left side you will see a box "Chat Activity". In there you'll see a chat room called UGPG Seed Auction. Go there, and bid early and often! We have some seeds that have been "hot" to say the least, which will attract the attention of the best growers on the planet. But all's fair in an auction! Come make some noise!

For me the bigpumpkins.com site seems to have trouble with the Chrome browser. I use Safari when going there. At one point I had figured out the issue, but at the moment I'm not remembering what the fix is. Make sure you are situated and ready to go come February 7th.



THE SPRING MEETING IS MARCH 29TH. THOSE
WHO ARE CURRENT WITH CLUB DUES WILL
RECEIVE THE CLUB SEED DISTRIBUTION AT THAT
TIME. PLAN TO PAY AT THE SPRING MEETING!
STILL A BARGAIN AT \$30.



My First Year Growing a Giant Pumpkin

BY JOSEPH MARZO

Last year, I decided to grow a giant pumpkin as a fun and exciting project to do with my young kids, I wanted something that would get them outside and hands on. I've had success with small gardens before, but I was looking for something unique and epic. Growing a giant pumpkin seemed like the perfect challenge. I purchased some Wallace Whopper seeds from Amazon and set a goal of growing a 100-pound pumpkin, thinking it would be a fun experiment. To my surprise, I far exceeded my expectations. The most exciting part was when the pumpkin hit its rapid growth phase—you could practically see it getting bigger each day! Watching it surpass my goal and ultimately reach 285 pounds was an amazing experience.

However, the learning curve for growing giants is steep. Initially, I had no real strategy. I simply planted my seed in a patch of dirt on the side of my house with no soil preparation whatsoever. I quickly realized I wasn't feeding or watering it correctly. My patch was extremely undersized (under 100 square feet), and I constantly battled the wind, which damaged the vines. Once the plant started growing, I dove into research, relying heavily on advice from Facebook groups and YouTube videos, additionally I found Ron Wallace, who answered every email I sent! I was very surprised how willing everyone was to help answer all my questions!

One of the biggest lessons I took away from my first season was the importance of soil preparation and nutrition. This year, I took soil samples and made significant improvements to my soil. I even built a brand-new garden space with two 150-square-foot patches, where I plan to grow a couple of "small giants." Now, I have a fertilizer schedule in place and a much better understanding of what it takes to grow these pumpkins successfully.

For anyone considering giving it a try, I highly encourage it! I already have my cousin on board for the 2025 season. My advice to new growers is to start with some basic research—growing giant pumpkins is a whole different ball game compared to regular carving pumpkins. Understanding proper watering and feeding techniques from the start would have made a huge difference for me. I also highly recommend soil testing before planting, so you know what you're working with and can make the necessary amendments. First-time growers should also know that growing giants is a bit of a gamble—sometimes you can do everything right and still face challenges or even fail. But the thrill of seeing that massive orange pumpkin in your yard is absolutely worth the effort and risk.



More Voices from the Club

BY DJ STEFFLER

As I look back on my successful 2024 season (with a new Idaho record!), I realize that it took me 7 years to learn how to grow a pumpkin 15 lbs bigger. Here are some of the things that I've learned in the last 7 years. Not enough water and fertilizer doesn't work well. Too much water and fertilizer doesn't work well either. I've tried both. If you have aphids one year, you'll probably have aphids every year - or spider mites, squash bugs, white flies. I finally have a basic schedule figured out with chemistries that work. I have also learned what downy mildew is and I'm very excited to control it better this year, with hopefully a much bigger pumpkin as a result. One new thing that I'm planning for 2025 is to divide my patch irrigation into 3 separate zones. It will be interesting to see the difference in water uptake throughout the patch. Here's a pro-tip for you. At the center street weigh off last year, there was a VIP lounge for the growers and their families. It was a great place to eat lunch and to get off of the busy street for a break. They even had some live music for a couple of hours. Hopefully it will be offered again this year and that more people will take advantage of it. I'm looking forward to meeting with everyone at our Spring Seminar. I'll bring some fish fertilizer, kelp meal and bacteria as usual. Best of luck to all this season!



Joining the Half-Ton Club!

BY JAMES CHAMPAGNE

I grew a personal best this year, finally breaking 1000 pounds. I grew the 1965 Caspers and crossed it with 2287 Sadiq. I lost the pumpkin on the 2287 at day 60, it was taping 600 pounds. The plant looked like it had yellow vine disease, from squash bugs most likely. I did cross the 1965 with the 2287. The pumpkin weighed 1002 pounds at the scale, 20% heavy! I taped a gallon jug to the cut vine overnight before the weigh off and measured half a gallon of water was taken up by the pumpkin or 4 pounds. Doing that got me over 1000 pounds!

I had a lot of other changes last year. I started a few weeks early and also had a larger hoophouse. The two plants stayed in the hoophouse until June 1. I used deicing cables and a thermostat to heat the soil. I made a homemade CO2 generator for the hoophouse, using bread yeast and sugar in a bottle. A heater stayed in the hoophouse and was on every night.

I used drip tape for the first time this year. I feel that was the biggest improvement. I used a small amount of liquid fertilizer for every watering, injected through the drip tape with a sump pump. I also used compost tea every week. I would hand spray and also add to irrigation water. I used a 100 gallon tank for mixing fertilizer. I did not use any granular Mycorrhizal inoculant.

I used a lot of wind screen and 30% shade cloth. The 1965 growing tips were sensitive to burning. I placed white weed barrier under the growing tips to keep them cool. But they would still burn when temps were above 90. The 2287 did better in the heat. I would move the weed barrier with the growing tips and bury the vines behind. This was very difficult to do with the tendrils grabbing the weed fabric every day. I could have kept the fabric in place but weeds would likely still grow underneath as the white let's a lot of light through. For days above 90, I had a single overhead mini sprinkler turn on for 2 minutes every 30 minutes during the hottest time of the day. This was just enough to wet the leaves and not the soil.

I sprayed pesticides every two weeks with a hand pump sprayer but was not enough. I had large aphid and thrip infestations in August and September. Squash bugs were bad as well starting in June. They likely took down the 2287. So pest control is my top priority this year.

These are the things I did last year that I feel contributed to my new personal best.