UGPG Newsletter, April 2023

Welcome to the new UGPG newsletter!

We've brought back the club newsletter, to be published each year in January, April, July, and October. This July we would like to highlight a number of club members and what they are doing in their patches. If you have content for the newsletter, please contact the editors, Andrew Allred (Facebook Messenger, mrfish1997@hotmail.com, or text 801-675-6995) or Cliff Warren (Facebook Messenger, cliffrwarren@gmail.com, or text at 208-317-6304).

Message from our new committee chair

At the spring meeting Clint Nash was introduced as the new club committee chair, sometimes also referred to as "our President". We would like to thank Jim Seamons for his service in this role over the last 3 years. Most club members know Clint! He has a knack for "creating fun", or making everyday things more interesting. Combine that with our hobby/sport, and you have a unique recipe! - Cliff

Outgoing chairman Jim Seamons (left) with Clint Nash (right) at the spring meeting.

Bam! It's grow time! By the time you read this, the snow should have soaked into your patch and hopefully your 2023 season is off to a good start. I want to thank all of the club for all that you do. Huge thanks to Jim Seamons for all of his work over the past few years leading the club. It is amazing all of the help I have gotten from so many of you over the years.

My journey to becoming "Clint Mash : Giant Seed Grower" began back in 2000. I was walking through a home improvement store looking for seeds to grow my first garden. I was mostly looking for tomatoes, peppers, and other ingredients to make my salsa for the farmer's market… but a different packet on the shelf caught my eye. It said "Giant Pumpkin", "Up to 10 feet around". I bought my first Big Max pumpkin seeds and I have been hooked ever since. That pumpkin weighed 110 lbs and in November of that year it became the greeter at my wedding. I grew pumpkins for the next few years from the seeds out of that pumpkin. I had fun growing them, but hadn't been able to grow anything bigger. Then one day early in 2007 I was working my night shift sorting letters at the post office. There was a jam in the sorting machine, and as I cleared the jam one of the letters I pulled out was a spring newsletter for the Utah Giant Pumpkin Growers. On the cover it had an event listed which was going to happen the next Saturday – the "Spring Seminar" at Thanksgiving Point. I showed up that morning and Gordon Tanner taught a class on how to grow these giant pumpkins and I was introduced to the Dill's Atlantic Giant. I ended up with a 174 lb pumpkin that year and then 301 lbs the next and I was hooked. Whatever your pumpkin story is that led you here, I am glad you made it.

The fun thing about this hobby of trying to grow gigantic things is that there are so many possibilities. It is finally Spring, which means it is goal time. Make some goals and have fun with it. If it is your first year growing, just making it to the weigh off in September is a great

goal. I am not gonna lie, this is actually a good goal for me any year still 😊 If you have already grown a big pumpkin, it is always fun to try and set a PB. If you haven't reached 1000 lbs, that is a great goal and you get a half ton patch at the end of the year if you make it. If you have already done that, go for 1500, or maybe even 2000, or you can try for our favorite Dr's state championship and go for 2288. Pumpkins aren't the only fun things to grow though; You can try going green with giant squash, build a trellis and try long gourds. There are good bushel gourd seeds out there, field pumpkins, marrows, sunflowers, watermelons, and my favorite to eat – giant tomatoes. We have even had a world record butternut squash grown in Utah. Here are a list of some Utah state records if you want a good challenge:

PUMPKIN – 2287 lbs (Sadiq)

Squash – 1068.5 (Tanner)

Long Gourd – 118.5 (Wolfley)

Watermelon – 217.5 (Laub)

Tomato – 5.29 (Varsity scouts)

Field Pumpkin – 164 (Laub)

Cabbage – 17 (Clark)

Bushel gourd – 182 lbs (Glassford)

Pear gourd - 79 (Bennett)

Marrow – 58.57 (Varsity scouts)

Cantaloupe – 54 (Laub)

Sunflower – 216 in. tall (Nash)

Sunflower – 25 in. wide (Pettit)

Swedes – 48 lbs (Glassford)

Over the years I have learned from some of the best. It has been crazy seeing how the science and tactics of growing these big pumpkins has changed since I first germinated one of these giant seeds. Someday I want to make a list of all of the random items that I have used during the process of growing giant pumpkins. I have met great pumpkin growers, and great people. As the sport of giant pumpkin growing evolves, and we become better pumpkin athletes we all learn from each other. Can I call us athletes? If you are a new grower, reach out to a veteran grower. If you are a veteran grower, reach out to a beginner. They might have different ideas you hadn't thought of before. I am glad to call so many of you friends, and I hope to get to know you better. I am excited to work with all of you as we try to have fun with this crazy hobby. Let's have a BIG 2023!! -*Clint Nash*

Long gourd competition won by Jodi Vollmer of Idaho Falls, 2021

Giant tomatoes being inspected and weighed by Dale Thurber, 2021

THIS EDITION'S
TOP STORIES

2287, the Mark to Beat

by Andrew Allred

In case you have been under a snowbank the last 6 months, the new Utah and UGPG record to beat is 2287 set by Mohammed Sadiq last year! At the spring meeting he shared experiences of how his plants were grown, as well as what it's like to attend the Nut Tree California weighoff, and the GPC annual event, this time in Boston Massachusetts. Congratulations Dr. Sadiq, having set the mark to beat!

A Few Ideas On Improving Soil Health

by DJ Steffler

That previously empty corner of your backyard that was growing grass just fine, now has some large expectations placed on it. It is now expected to grow the largest pumpkin in the history of the world, the continent, or maybe just the state. At the very least it should be the biggest on the block and hopefully a personal best (each and every year). As the size of our dreams (and budgets) grow, how do we improve the quality of our soil? If your soil is already ideal in every way, congrats! You don't need to do anything. Plant that champion already.

Characteristics of healthy productive soils are usually grouped by chemical, physical, and biological properties. The chemical properties include what is shown in the soil test and the nutrients to be added, trying to keep a good balance and ratio with the chemistry, etc. The physical properties include soil texture (size of soil particles and the ratio of them), compaction (size of pores available for water and air), depth of soil, etc. Biological properties include having lots of desirable bacteria and fungi that recycle and release nutrients to the roots.

What are some things we can do to take our soil to the next level?

1. Add compost yearly until you reach 5% organic matter. Starting with animal compost is great because it is high in nutrients, especially phosphate. The good advice of testing your soil before amending also applies to compost. If you add too much compost you can end up with excess phosphate and micronutrients that will challenge your soil chemistry for years. Plant based compost is lower in nutrients and is preferred if your nutrient levels are already adequate. You can add smaller amounts yearly or every 2-3 years to maintain organic matter levels. Organic matter levels greater than 5% lead to increased disease pressure. It usually takes several years to get your organic matter levels where you want them.
2. The next level is to grow your own organic matter. If you promptly remove your vines after harvest, you should have time to plant a winter rye cover crop. You don't need to do a complete till and spend a lot of time with it. Just rake the seeds in and water it up. In addition to increasing your organic matter, the roots keep the biology active. Roots feed the bacteria with exudates created from photosynthesis and the bacteria provide the plant with needed nutrients. By-products from the bacteria

acidify the rhizosphere which improves the chemical properties and the availability of nutrients that have been tied up due to pH. Healthy roots = healthy soil. Roots are the best input we can add to our soil. Cover crops recycle and upcycle nutrients making them more available for next years' plant. Deeper roots will pull nutrients up and fibrous roots help hold the soil in place preventing erosion. Depending on what kind of spring you have, you may be able to till the cover crop and plant another one.

3. Additional tips on cover crops include growing mixed blends or mustard. Mustard is great for disease suppression. For maximum benefit you need enough time to grow it to early bloom before tilling. This can be a challenge most years in the Utah area. If you sadly lose your plant or pumpkin before the weigh off and end up with additional growing time on your hands, this is an excellent opportunity to improve your soil and your odds of getting a giant to the finish line next year. A good mustard crop is a silver lining for a disappointing season. With a full season available, grow a couple of mustard crops followed by winter rye. The instructions and best practices say to mow or chop the mustard, till it in and then water it up - without delay between the steps. This helps to hold the mustard gas in the soil.
4. The latest practice on disease suppression in soil is called Anaerobic Soil Disinfestation or ASD for short. You can find many university studies online that show great results for disease suppression. ASD is a combination of many of the things mentioned so far. The basic steps of ASD are:
    a. Add organic matter that is easily broken down. It can be something dry or liquid spread throughout the patch. Compost, grass, alfalfa pellets, ect. Low nutrient materials are best. If you're taking the season off, it can be a cover crop also.
    b. Till everything in and water until saturated. Then cover with plastic, sealing the edges. The soil needs to be at least 60 degrees for 6-8 weeks or 85 degrees for 3 weeks.

With ASD you are increasing the bacterial population in the soil by adding organic matter to warm soil. The saturated soil displaces air and the plastic increases the soil temperature and prevents air exchange or additional oxygen. When the bacteria run out of oxygen, the soil goes anaerobic and the surplus bacteria die off. The by-product of the dead bacteria is what suppresses the diseases in the soil. After the plastic is removed, the soil re-aerates and the remaining beneficial bacteria replenish.

I first heard about ASD while listening to a Regenerative Agriculture Podcast by John Kempf. I became more excited as I read university studies and their results. I feel that ASD

is a great way to bring several best practices together, and I'm looking forward to seeing the results in my own backyard patch. I wish everyone good luck, good weather, good seeds and good soil this year.
I'll see you this fall at the weigh-off! - *DJ Steffler*

Insect Management: How to manage the good, the bad, and the fuzzy.

by Andrew Allred

Insects play a huge role in gardening. They can be your best friend or your greatest enemy. Naturally we want to attract the good bugs, our pollinators for example, while keeping the menacing squash bugs and aphids at bay. It can become a hard balance to maintain. There are many pesticides that will kill your squash bugs and aphids (Sevin, bifenthrin, carbaryl, imidacloprid, a more natural option is Neem oil extract, and many more). Unfortunately, these same chemicals are very toxic; not only to
humans, but to all of the good bugs too. Save the bees! Some growers prefer the nuclear option of chemicals, while others go organic, like using dish soap and water or Neem oil. Here are some options to help attract the good bugs and identify which bugs are beneficial while preventing and managing the bugs you don't want.

The Good:
Garden Spiders can be your absolute best friend. They look ugly and scary but they are your #1 ally in your war against squash bugs, aphids and all other harmful bugs. You
can attract garden spiders by planting stalky plants for them to build their webbing through. Sunflowers, rhubarb, beans, corn and tall flowers are great options for that.

Tachinid flies are a less known friend to the garden. They are one of the most important and beneficial insects for squash bug control. This fly lays 100 or so eggs on the undersides of squash bug nymphs and adults. The larvae consume squash bugs as food. Adult flies feed only on nectar and pollen, so they won't harm your vegetable plants. Attract these allies by growing plants that bear umbels of flat florets, including carrots, cilantro, dill, coriander, buckwheat and sweet clover. Anise hyssop (Agastache) is also a favorite of tachinid flies.

Ground Beetles are one of those that can go in the good and bad categories depending on topic of discussion. For your garden they will feed on squash bug eggs if they can find them. However, in mid to late summer they can be a nuisance by flocking around your house and foundation.

The Bad:
Squash bugs are your most common enemy to the pumpkin patch. They suck the sap out of leaves with their piercing-sucking mouthparts. Their feeding causes yellow spots that eventually turn brown. The feeding also affects the flow of water and nutrients and, when severe, can

cause wilting. Young plants can die from their attacks, which is a really sad and a very preventable way to lose your prize plant growing that next record pumpkin. Look for squash bugs on top of plants and underneath the leaves. If you start to see symptoms of squash bugs do a thorough search of your plant, including checking the undersides of leaves for eggs. If you see any bugs, kill them on site. It's nothing a pair of scissors or boots can't handle. You can snip them in half or simply squish them under foot. Scrape the eggs off plant leaves and destroy those as well. Squash bugs can survive as adults through the winter by hiding under plant debris. It's a good reason to clean out the patch each fall.

Aphids do damage through eating your plants, but they can do more through viruses they will potentially transmit. Over one hundred different plant viruses can be transmitted by adults as well as nymphs. Both persistent viruses, which move through the feeding secretions of the aphid, and non-persistent viruses, which are only temporary contaminants of aphid mouthparts, are effectively transmitted by aphids

The Fuzzy
Crucial to every garden is our fuzzy winged friends, the bees . Without them to keep everything pollinated and looking fresh, it would be much harder to grow our giant pumpkins. While many of us self pollinate our prize plants, we rely on the bees to take care of the rest of the garden, including all of those plants which help to attract the good bugs. I myself am working towards having a beehive in my yard, but in the meantime here are some good tips to promote bee health and bring them to your garden.

If you have fruit trees in the yard, those will be a great attractor of the bees, especially during the springtime. Marigold's are a favorite flower amongst most households and they are popular with the bees as well. Definitely a one flower two purpose deal. Lavender is pure gold for bees. They absolutely love it and they are a great addition for any yard and garden.

Insect management is a hugely underrated part of the gardening experience. It can be hard to manage some years, but can make the difference between having the next record pumpkin or not.

Everyone has their styles and techniques. Not all insects are bad and not all are good. It's important to distinguish the difference. There's a lot of resources out there if you find yourself in need of help. Best of luck everyone and happy growing!
-Andrew Allred

Below are examples of aphids and squash bugs




Rumor Mill

by anonymous

Are there rumors out there? Oh yes there are!

Some might come to fruition, and will have a direct impact on everyone in the club.

I wish I could say more. Stay tuned.

Editor Notes

by Cliff Warren

What a winter! I can remember the snow starting to fall in early November, and some parts of my yard were never clear until April. This reminds me of the year 1984. I was a freshman at USU. Preparing to serve a mission that summer, and wanting more than anything to have a beautiful spring to enjoy. Well, that spring was shorter than most. There was snow on the ground until mid-April, and then in May the temperatures soared. Mountain snows became

rivers flowing through the streets of Salt Lake City. Someone you know probably helped with sandbags to direct the water to the west. It will be interesting to see what happens in May 2023.

To stick with this pursuit of giant pumpkins, one must become an eternal optimist. You really need to have a belief that this coming season will be better than ever! In a year like this it's a challenge to keep that positivity. We already look out over snow covered gardens or soil we can't quite prepare yet, and worry that if it goes on much longer, how can we make up for that lost time? The optimist needs to come through now. Maybe there won't be so many days over 100 F? Maybe we'll learn something new that we might have missed when holding on to old schedules and habits.

My mind goes back to the spring meeting of 2022. Our 2021 champion Ross Bowman gave a talk in that meeting, and if you missed it you really did miss out. I'm going to paraphrase a thought that he gave: *Now that I've set the Utah record, some of my friends have asked if I will "Go out on top." Call it quits now, as champion. But I thought, I have to be somewhere, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year. Given that reality, why wouldn't I want to spend some of that time in my patch and in my garden?*"

That's the optimism we're seeking, whether our plans come together or not. Find joy in the journey.

We miss Ross and wish him all the best down in St. George.

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