

On Oct, 20,2023 The *Pacific Northwest Giant Pumpkin Grower* club member and roving reporter Gerry Gadberry had a unique inside opportunity to interview the new 2023 World Record giant pumpkin record holder Travis Gienger and ask him a few questions about his amazing season and uncover a few of his unique growing techniques.

First of all, Congratulations Travis on your massive 2,749 pound world record giant pumpkin! Many of us followed your amazing season on social media this year and are now rethinking a lot of the traditional growing techniques we thought were set in stone. After seeing how you grew a 2222 (damaged) pumpkin that went down early alongside of your new world record 2,749 pumpkin, both grown outdoors back to back in your backyard, perhaps we need to re-evaluate some of our techniques?

- 1) Travis for the past two years you have set the national giant pumpkin records on fire and now this year you threw down a new World Record! You went from a very respectable 1788 pounds in 2019 to a US record 2350 (Tiger King) in 2020, then another US Record 2560 (Maverick) in 2022 and now a 2,749 (Michale Jordon) World Record in 2023! What factors do you think contributed the most to your phenomenal success the last few years?

I feel like my soil was young in the modification process when the 1788 in 2019 grew. Since then I think the soil has gotten a little better even though the past couple years all I've done was a little boron, elemental sulfur, and a few pounds urea. The products and techniques I am implementing have improved as well. I figured out a recipe that works for me and follow it throughout the season. At the end of the season I look at how I can make the recipe better and hope to improve every year.

- 2) Can you tell us what your patch prep consists of, any special amendments / cover crops you used and the size of your pumpkin patch and plant size?

My patch is about 80 x 50, I grow two plants and often grow outside the fenced area. Patch prep nowadays is very easy, get rid of plants in fall, mix it up quick before winter. Spring I send in a soil sample. Check my Ph, modify with sulfur, boron, and nitrogen quick, set up hoop houses a day before planting and grow.

- 3) You grew two of your massive pumpkins this year "Godzilla" that went down from a rib split at 2222 pounds and your world record 2749 pound pumpkin. Can you tell us a bit about how these were grown; your pruning techniques, do you bury vines and add biologicals in your trench mix?



2222 Ginger "Godzilla"

The two plants were both decent but not ideal normal circumstances. I had a ton of energy behind them as I was burying my vines religiously with my special garden mix soil (mostly peat, perlite, lime, compost, sand, and a few other things) also all the biology I can cram in there as well. I try to grow the plants however they grow. Like I said, this year I lost a couple vines and it wasn't the ideal situation but we made something of it.

- 4) Travis your plants were huge by the end of May compared to ours and many other growers. Can you tell us when you started the seeds, when you set them out, and when you pollinated them. Did you use grow lights in the hoop houses, heat cables, and space heaters. Do you use CO2 to boost plant growth?

My starts are something I take a lot of pride in. It's the one advantage I have over anyone and I need all I can get in the frozen tundra! My attention to detail in the beginning is precision. Everything has to be perfect and these plants just scream out of the gate! Most my plants were started April 10th and my other I ended up using was started late on April 15th. I may start later this year and can usually make up weeks on some pretty good growers. Timing is everything because if we get a cold June the pollinations and plants will just sit there. I feel I was one of the first to do the grow light thing and have been playing with some different setups nowadays. It can help slightly in the beginning, and again I will take anything I can get I guess. The Co2 thing I tried this year. To be totally honest, the plant I basically didn't use much Co2 on was much bigger. (3 days of the 24 It got some Co2) Do I think it's necessary,

absolutely not! It's the one thing that if you took it away from my setup, I wouldn't care. However, I do feel it helps with a wider degree of temperature windows. For example, I was in Wisconsin tilling one morning and left the huts closed. Looked at my phone and it was about 135 degrees for 3 hours inside the huts. I figured season over go onto to 2024. Wife said they were a little wilted but just fine. Next day you would swear nothing happened, so in that regard if that is all it gives me, I guess I will try it again next year. People always look for the magic bullet or the secret and I can tell you there isn't any, it's a combination of a lot of little things over the course of 184 days.

- 5) Can you tell us about how your 2749 pound "Michael Jordan" world record pumpkin came to be grown on a tertiary vine and do you think it would have had a different outcome if it was grown on the main vine?

Both my pumpkins were tertiaries this year. I smoked a couple vines due to a strong biological mix (wasn't till late in the season I discovered my combination of too much Azos with a lot of other things shriveled up some vines.) That was the loss of some of the mains I had this spring. Other times it was just being gone and growing into chairs, and hoops house ends, whoops. The tertiary thing didn't seem to have any ill effects. To be honest I kind of forgot about it most of the season but it was cool to look back and know really any random side vines on the plant are capable of World Records now. My Godzilla plant lost the main at about 8ft, started another grew into chair at 13ft, went back to about 10ft and picked a random tertiary off the secondary and set a pumpkin. That pumpkin would have easily beat my 2,749 so again two good examples. Do as I say, not as I do, I would probably default to a main.



2749 WR

- 6) Can you tell us about your watering techniques, do you use drip, overhead or a combination? You mentioned you use a Dosatron fertilizer injector, can you tell us what products you send to the plants in your Dosatron tank and how do you determine what fertilizers, fungicides, insecticides etc. to add? Do you use a timer to control your watering schedules?

I overhead water with cheap sprinklers mounted on a tall pole. I run everything thru the Dosatron and thru those sprinklers. My leaves hate me but whatever it's not a beauty contest. I look at my plants and decide what fertilizers I am going to hurl at them that day. I am like a baker and couldn't even tell you how much or ratios. I usually keep my EC very low and just send it. I use bit of everything like, 3 18 18, 6 12 12, TKO, Cal mag, 0 0 25, essential plus, companion, seaweed, fish, and seaweed mix, humic, fulvic, boron, micronutrients, copper, fungicides, insecticides, and a variety of biologicals like SP 1, MT 17. Determining what to fertilize with, I don't tissue test, in fact I was given 12 free tissue tests and used 0. I simply watch my plants and rely on previous years knowledge and modify daily. Watering is difficult, it's the one thing I still struggle with. Usually uneven, often way too much, and sometimes not enough. Constant adjusting day to day is needed in my experience. The one thing I get away with is I am on a hill and sandy loam so I do drain fairly well.

- 7) Travis you are obviously onto something special with your horticultural techniques and approach to giant pumpkin growing. You are routinely growing pumpkins that are nearly twice the size of your average pumpkin grower (like me). What advise can you give to us competitive growers that are looking at your results and wondering what the heck can I do to achieve those results?

There are very few people in the world willing to actually do what it takes to achieve what these giants are capable of. With that being said, define your goals and work towards them. The genetics are there, anyone can grow a big pumpkin, especially once. I think the key is to start working on a recipe that works for you and at the end of every year or even during it modify. I think most growers when it comes to their plants are on auto pilot because they see that's what everyone else is doing. Don't be everyone else, go out and try something different, out of the box. Who knows, it may end up working and you just may be surprised and get a World Record.

Thank you Travis Gienger for the very informative and fun interview you truly are the 2023 Pumpkin King!



The Ginger Family with their 2749 at Half Moon Bay 2023



Lilly and the Giant in the Patch

