

PNWGPG Interview with Grower Travis Gienger
11/18/2022

Grower of the 2560 pound 2022 US Record Pumpkin and Half Moon Bay Winner Travis Gienger took some time to answer a few interview questions from PNWGPG reporter Gerry Gadberry. This article will appear in our newsletter and on our website for our members. Thank you for your contribution Travis, we appreciate the time you have taken to share some of your knowledge and growing techniques with us!



1: What got you started in this hobby and how long have you been growing giants?

I have been growing for now 28 years. My relatives and dad were all a bunch of gardeners and somehow my summer choir was taking care of the garden. I would go to the Minnesota state fair and see the giant pumpkins where Glen Brown was usually the winner. I got to eventually meet him and grew my first 447 pounder when I was 14.

2: What is your typical weather like and how big is your growing area?

My growing area is 75x47 ish and I grow two plants. My weather is usually pretty sketchy in the spring. May is always a question mark with temps below freezing frequently and early June can be 90's or below freezing as well. Love our mid-June, July, and early August usually, however storms can take you out at any minute. Late August gets cold here in fact had 40 degrees on the button twice and 2 more 45's this year alone! We are thrilled if we make it into mid-September without a frost.

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3: Can you describe your soil type and typical amendments, cover crops, and patch prep techniques you use?

My parent soil material is sand, it was junk when I began but sand is easy to modify. I started with finely ground leaves, grass, and then added turkey manure in the spring. This year all I did was 30 pounds of urea, 3 pounds borax and a little elemental sulfur across 3750 sf.

4: What is your water source, how much water do you typically use a week, and do you use “fertigation” to inject nutrients into the water, do you use drip or overhead?

I have a well, the water is cold, but decent Ph around 7. I used a Dosatron this year and loved it. I use on average about 150 to 200 gallons of water per plant per day but again all depends on sun, clouds, wind, and heat. I do overhead sprinklers, I upgraded to two 7\$ sprinklers this year. I mix my ferts in the Dosatron and out it sprays!



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5: You're 2022 season was fantastic! Earning you the coveted US Record title and first place at Half Moon Bay. Growing a 2560-pound pumpkin a truly amazing accomplishment! Was it grown under a greenhouse or outdoors, and do you use soil heating cables? How did you decide on what seeds to grow, and do you think the World Record will be broken in 2023?

The seed selection was easy, I saw quite a few people knock their personal bests out of the park with the 1885 so figured it had some potential. I grow outside and that is one of my main challenges is fighting MN weather. I would do a greenhouse but even me teaching a greenhouse class here and there, I know I would go backwards for a year or two. We have to use heat cables here almost not a choice. In my opinion yes, the world record will get broken in 23 and it will be someone with a climate-controlled greenhouse overseas!

6: Your 2560 had a couple of really deep scars in it, can you share what happened to it?

So, on day 5, I dropped a 5 gallon bucket full of dirt right in it when it was less than a pound. Everyone thought it wouldn't make it. Lone behold I was all in 2 days later and cut all the others off and went on to be the largest ever in north America!



7: What does your fertilizer / fungicide / insect program typically look like? Are you an organic gardener, commercial fertilizer user or both and is you're fertilizing based on tissue and soil tests?

I have squash vine borers and they are nearly impossible to treat organically so there is that. Insects this year I used Ascelepryn as a systemic and Crosscheck as a contact tried to do something every week up till about August but then I can usually lay off. Fungicides I used Banner II max, Daconil, Signature, TKO, some other yellow stuff my coworker who works at a golf course gave me (most my insecticides and fungicides I use golf course stuff, we only need a tiny, tiny little bit). Fertilizers I guess I start out with nothing with numbers basically. If your soil is anything decent these plants just don't need a ton right away. I use a lot of biologicals like Companion, Azos, fish and seaweed, Essential plus, Humic, Fulvic, SP 1, MT 17, maybe some Cal Carb and send that until fruit set. Once my fruit is set I will switch to things like 12-4-12, 6-12-12, TKO, 0-0-25, Cal Mag, as well as all the originals that sent my plant out of the gate. I have only soil sampled once a year in the spring and adjusted. I did tissue test this year once

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but in my opinion was a waste of money for me. There is no way someone out there is sitting on the exact information at the exact stage of plant life at the exact leaf petiole that sat there for a week decaying in the mail, saying this is what you need to get a 2500+ pounder. I do feel however, that a tissue test can be used as an indicator of extremes, so don't get discouraged if you're not hitting those numbers.

8: What factors do you think contributed the most to your phenomenal success the last couple of years? You went from a very respectable 1788 pounds in 2019 to 2350 (Tiger King) in 2020 and now your 2560 (Maverick) in 2022.

For me the 2350 and 2560 were completely different techniques. I feel like the soil was just getting prime in 2020 and now the soil is mature. I grow in the same spot over and over, now going on year 8 without moving that stump an inch! Knock on wood, no disease pressure but for me I think of growing pumpkins as a job. Not in the sense of making money, rather it is my job to send this little seed into oblivion and give it the best life possible. If the spring hoops need to be opened at an exact certain time, I do it. If my weather says I have to do something ridiculous I do it. I put my pumpkins before a lot of things and thankfully my family supports it. I also only attempt to grow two plants and to be honest I have given up on pumpkins that are over 1000 pounds on day 40 because I felt the other pumpkin had a better chance. I really try to focus on one when it gets going because time and effort.

9: Travis you have been doing this a long time now. What are some of the biggest things you've learned about pumpkins and how have they changed your current practices? Can you walk us through some of your growing techniques / cultural practices and plant design?

I used to say if you could grow a pumpkin for 60 days you were doing great. I look at this year and my pumpkin gained a half inch circumference on day 117. That really changes the perspective of growing if you look at 120 days of growth. You need to get these plants out to an early jump start. You also need to be milking the late season somehow. My plant I believe in the horticultural term, "Apical Dominance," so I keep my main growing till about mid-August when it usually breaks off by default at about 70ft. This year I tried to focus the energy around the pumpkin a bit more but in my opinion vine patterns don't really matter. Just grow a nice, big, healthy plant and fill in your space however and you will get a ginormous pumpkin regardless.

10: What advice do you have for growers looking to increase their personal bests in the patch?

Growing is definitely a marathon. It might not even be a one year marathon either! Define your level of insanity, because it is insane what we go thru to create these monsters. Do you want a 1000, 1500, 2000, 2500, or a WR? If you can answer that question, then it's easy to work backwards towards the solution. I think one thing that can help is take every single leaf node, every root node, every section of every vine and pretend you are burying the best plant in the world. Do that every day with proper

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horticulture/gardening love and your plant will reward you. I think too many focus on well I am growing 3 pumpkins because someone, somewhere decided there is a jacket for that, and I have a 1500 square foot space so I can grow 3. It only takes one for a world record so focus on what it takes, you may not succeed every year, but you will improve your quality.

11: What is your favorite seed stock and what seeds out there do you think have the most potential?

I don't know for me I am a little biased but everything I do is trial and error. I feel a regional seed that got grown to potential is better for me personally. The 1885 proved it had the size, but weight wise we knew it wouldn't go 20%, now some of the crosses are pretty exciting and feel even better than the original. I think we have what it takes to reach 3,000 it's just what seed. Whatever seed it is I will give it the best life possible and think most seeds have the potential for 2200 plus now with proper care. I like to do proven seeds but it's hard not to get excited about some of the crosses.... Barry's ;)

The PNWGPG will have a couple of Travis Ginger's 2560 seeds available at our upcoming winter auctions along with a couple of "Barry's ;)" Hot Cross seeds.

Thank you Travis Gienger for the fun interview!

