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FEATURES

Seed Starting

Plant Deficiency's

Being social

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Seed Starting 2

Missing Females 3

Pollination 4

Deficiency's 6

October 2017 Newsletter

Hi and welcome to the October edition of The Pumpkin Post. As I'm writing this it's pouring with rain outside and the pumpkin growing season can't come soon enough, I'm being kept busy helping to organize The Great Pumpkin Carnival here in Hamilton, which is on the 8th of April 2018 and I highly recommend attending it.

I'm now sitting in the presidents chair of the Carnival and while it is a little daunting I am surrounded by a great team and we are working hard to put on another great event.

And just today it hit me, this will be my 10th year of this giant pumpkin lark.

What started as being given a seedling by my sister all

those years ago has started a journey I never knew I'd be on.

While looking back there are a lot of things I wish I had started earlier or done differently, but learning from the past and looking forward to the next 10 years of giant pumpkin growing is a very exciting thought.

From learning new things, building a website, meeting lots and lots of people, talking about pumpkins to anyone that would listen, making friendships, helping new growers, visiting pumpkin events all around the country, and everything else in between including being in a pumpkin boat it sure has been a very awesome ride.

And for everybody out there that has come along for the ride thank you, the new and not so new growers out there make this all worthwhile. The small but growing community of giant pumpkin growers here in NZ are a great bunch of people.

Wherever you are in your pumpkin journey I hope it's a been a good one, share your experience with others and lets grow this giant hobby.



Sam

Website Updates

I'm doing it in the order of the growing season and hope to have all the latest info up before you'll need it.

If you have any questions about anything you come across, get hold of me via the contact page and I'll answer your question or point you in the right direction.

The evolution of the website carries on and this time around I am sorting out all the How-To pages to be a lot more readable with better images and of course updating all the info as I go along.

It can be a slow process, working out what needs to go and what needs to stay,

- Life-Cycle of a Giant Pumpkin
- Sourcing Giant Pumpkin Seeds
- Patch Selection for your Giant Pumpkin
- Soil Preparation for your Giant Pumpkin
- Seed Starting Guide for Giant Pumpkins
- Transplanting your Giant Pumpkin Seedling
- Watering your Giant Pumpkin
- Fertilising your Giant Pumpkin
- Pollination
- Positioning
- How Many Giant Pumpkins to have?
- Picking the Best
- Vines and Pruning
- Shade Protection for your Giant Pumpkin
- Diseases/Problems
- Transporting your Giant Pumpkin
- Saving Giant Pumpkin Seeds

Weight Estimation Charts, the page to help you work out an estimate of your pumpkins weight.

Seed Starting - Starting the Seed



Filed Seed

I see a lot of new growers not taking the time to start their giant pumpkin seed off correctly, it doesn't matter what seed you have, giving your giant pumpkin seedling the best start you can helps a lot.

I've covered the whole seed starting plan on the website right here: <http://www.giantpumpkins.co.nz/how-to-page/seed-starting-guide/>

The basics revolve around two main parts:

Filing the seed

Filing the seed is as simple as it sounds, it is to allow moisture into the seed and kick start the see to germinate.

Soaking the seed

You only need to talk to different growers to see there is a wide variety of ways to soak the seed, I've tried a bunch over the years and to be honest haven't seen much difference so don't worry if you don't have a supply of humic acid etc.

Soaking times for different people can vary from 1 - 4

hours is quite common.

Warm water should be used for this, the longer the time the more chance of rot or mould forming.

The main thing is that they germinate and you have a seedling, remember to start backups as well at staggered intervals, if you don't need them you can give them away, if do need them you will be glad you started them.

"DON'T GET SOME DIRT FROM OUTSIDE AND CHUCK IT IN A POT."

Seed Starting - Germination Box

Once you have filed and soaked your seed you want to get your seed into a pot of growing media, this should be common sense for most people, but just to clarify.

DON'T GET SOME DIRT FROM OUTSIDE AND CHUCK IT IN A POT.

Get your hands on some seed raising mix or something similar, this is what is known as soilless growing media.

Soil is great for when the seedling goes out in the patch, but at this super early stage

the soil might have bad stuff that can affect your seed. So best to get your hands on seed raising mix which is a sterile product.

Keeping this seed at a consistent temp through this period is the key to fast germination. The temperature you want is 85 - 89°F which is 29.4 - 31.6°C

There are many ways to provide warmth to your seed.

These could include:

- Heat pad with ther-

mostat in a box.

- Mesh over lightbulbs in an old chilly bin.
- Hot water cupboard

Have a look at what you have available to you.

TIP:

Once the seedling first starts to emerge from the growing media, stop the heat source, this will help stop the seedling becoming leggy and keep it nice and short.



Inside my home made grow box.

For my grow box I use a plastic box with a lid.

On the base of this I have a heat mat that's used in the brewing world. While it doesn't have a thermostat on it, I did attach an inexpensive aquarium thermometer.

To help spread the heat from the pad I built a small wooden

platform on top.

Light is provided by an LED aquarium light

You can see more photos and read more about my set up in a blog post from 2015 [right here.](#)

For me this set up is a cheap easy way to help the seeds germinate, it's easy to

transport around if you need to move.

If I wanted to start more than 4 seeds I might need to look at a bigger set up, but with staggering seed starting this method works for me.

Transplanting



Transplanting early means your seedling is putting out roots and getting nutrients from the patch which is what you want, but the trick to getting them out there early is to make sure that they cope with the move from a nice

Giant pumpkin seedling

warm pot to out in the pumpkin patch.

Hardening off your plant is something that is done to a wide variety of plants, this acclimatizes the fragile

seedlings before being put into the ground and reduces shock to the plant.

When I'm selling or giving away seedlings I always make a point to let people know how to work out which way the vine will run. Something that would make all the

difference to the people that have had bad experiences of a pumpkin plant growing all over their garden in the wrong way.

The first two leaves you see at germination are the cotyledon leaves, the next one is the first true leaf. The vine will run opposite that middle leaf.



“This is why staggered backups are a great idea and help reduce the pain of losing a plant.”

Early Protection

Once in the patch you will most likely have to give your pumpkin seedling some protection. With random cold nights and frosts, to wind and animals there are a lot of things out there that could easily destroy your seedling.

This is why staggered backups are a great idea and help reduce the pain of losing a plant.

A small greenhouse/cloche type

setup is a great idea and you only have to do a quick google search to see the different types there you could use.

They don't have to be fancy, they don't have to be the biggest thing around, they just need to offer the seedling protection from the elements.

If you aren't home during the day you will need to think about how

you provide ventilation to your seedling, nothing is worse than cooking a plant when the sun comes out on a hot day.



Where's the Females?

Something that catches new growers out sometimes is the lack of female flowers on the plant.

With male flowers arriving first and appearing all over the plant at every leaf axil you might be wondering what is going on. Just wait a while and the female flowers will appear.

Female flowers have a small ball at the base and this is the pumpkin,

waiting to be pollinated.

Have faith in the plant and keep a good eye on it, the leaves can sometimes make things tricky to spot.

The next step is pollination, something that can be done yourself or left up to nature.



Female giant pumpkin flower

Know you Lobe

What is a lobe you might be wondering? Well when the female flowers form and you are ready to pollinate, the



little yellow bits inside the female flower are the lobes.

When the pumpkin grows these become the blossom end of the pumpkin. There are a couple of things to keep and eye out for. If you can

see seeds present within the blossom it is best not to use that one for your pumpkin. Pumpkins grown from these tend to have a very thin blossom end and tend to split.

The same sort of thinking can be said about 3 and 4 lobes, 5 is better and picking lobes that are uniform and even will help you later on in the season.

“It just means you have to be looking at your plant waiting for the perfect female flower.”

Pollination

You have two choices when it comes to pollination. Do it by hand yourself, or leave it up to nature to sort out.

The benefits of doing by hand are, you know when exactly it was done which is handy when tracking your pumpkin, it allows you to do crosses with other pumpkins and know what the crosses were, and it gives you more certainty over the position of the

pumpkin.

It just means you have to be looking at your plant waiting for the perfect female flower.

It's as simple as breaking the flower petals off of the male flower and using it to swab the pollen onto all the female lobes.



Pumpkins Aborting

You've checked your lobes, done hand pollination and yet your pumpkin that you want aborts, shrivels up and rots.

This can happen for a variety of reason and it is one of those things you need to have in the back of your mind, if this doesn't set and grow properly what other pump-

kins will I use.

Setting multiple pumpkins on a plant and then picking the best looking, best position and best growing one is what smart growers do.

Pumpkins can abort due to the genetics of the plant, stress from a variety of factors, not being shaded earlier

enough, or having nitrogen levels so high the plant doesn't want to grow fruit and just wants to lay out more vines and leaves.

Whatever the case is, I'm sure almost all growers have experienced losing a pumpkin early on. Luckily it isn't the end of the world.

Burying Vines

Burying vines is an important part of looking after a giant pumpkin plant properly, and to be honest it is something I have neglected over the years.

While I am all on board with it now, due to my location and the worlds smallest giant pumpkin patch, it's not something I can even do.

The basics of vine burying is burying the vine as it grows, this helps anchor the plant in case of wind to prevent damage, and more importantly is means that everywhere the base of a leaf connects



to the vine another root will form. Having this massive root system is what will provide the pumpkin with a lot of it's nutrients.

Vine burying goes hand in hand

with pruning of the vine and this makes sure there as much leaves as possible within the given space of the patch, while providing adequate ventilation at the same time.

A new way of vine burying involves plastic pot filled with garden mix and put upside down on the leaf axis's, I hope to bring you info on how well this works in a future issue.

“To catch the reader's attention, place an interesting sentence or quote from the story here.”

BigPumpkins.com



BigPumpkins.com the oldest, biggest and best pumpkin website around, why is it the best? Well it's where all the growers from around the world hang out.

Make sure to check out the growers diaries, as well as awesome pictures of pumpkins there is a lot of great ideas people are trying, and if you want to contact any of the growers, well there is a little button at the top of each individu-

al post which when clicked will give you their email address.

It's also the place to get great seeds from, so while it is too late for this season make sure to keep an eye out for all the seed auctions happening during December.

You can pick up amazing pumpkin genetics and help support the many growers and clubs that are constantly pushing the boundaries

on giant pumpkin growing.

And of course make sure you go and read the message board, a lot of conversations happen in the general board and is a good place to start. Everyone is helpful and if you have any questions this is the place to post them (after searching the site of course)

All of this for free, so what are you waiting for?

Running an Event

Running a giant pumpkin event can be a rewarding experience, from having people take part right through to helping raise money for your cause if that's what you are wanting to achieve from it. But here's the thing, it takes a lot of hard work to organize, lots of communication with people all over the place, and while it's easy to get people enthusiastic early on, the results you might be want-

ing might not be what you get at your event.

So, what can you do to help?

If your supplying the plant for people to grow, make sure to give them a seedling rather than a seed.

Keep people updated on what is happening at the event and during the season, it's a long time from planting to an event, some people

will have bad luck or forget about it.

What incentives do you have to make people turn up, prizes or other things to see and do.

For a while bunch of other info around running a pumpkin event make sure to get the FREE copy of [How to run a giant pumpkin event.](#)

Broad Forks



A Crafty Gatherer Broad Fork



If your patch isn't big enough to justify machinery, or you don't want to spend money on buying or hiring something like a rotary hoe but the thought of using a spade or normal garden fork sounds terrible, then a broad fork might be something to look into.

They are low maintenance, can last a long time, come in different sizes and can really dig up large areas in short periods of time.



Craft Gatherer are the people you want to talk to if you are after a broad fork for your patch or garden. Based in

Tauranga each fork comes in different options.



You can find out more about Craft Gardener and the products they provide over at their website:

www.craftygatherer.co.nz

Plant Deficiency's

“Learning what different nutrient deficiency's look like can help steer you into the right direction.”

If you're not getting soil tests done for your patch then your probably not going to be getting foliar tests done if something seems wrong with your plant. So what can you do?

Talking to seasoned gardeners/giant pumpkin growers is the way to go. But even before that, what could you do?

Learning what different nutrient deficiency's look like can help steer you into the right direction.

Learning what effects pumpkin plants, the symptoms and cures isn't an easy thing to just pick up overnight, but overtime, paying attention and learning you'll get better at tit.

Here is a general chart that could be good as a starting point. For a bigger version of this image make sure to click on it.

Deficiency Chart of Micronutrients

<p>Boron: Discoloration of leaf buds. Breaking and dropping of buds</p>	<p>Calcium: Plant dark green. Tender leaves pale. Drying starts from the tips. Eventually leaf buds die.</p>
<p>Sulphur: Leaves light green. Veins pale green. No spots.</p>	<p>Iron: Leaves pale. No spots. Major veins green.</p>
<p>Manganese: Leaves pale in color. Veins and venules dark green and reticulated</p>	<p>Copper: Pale pink between the veins. Wilt and drop.</p>
<p>Zinc: Leaves pale, narrow and short Veins dark green. Dark spots on leaves and edges.</p>	<p>Molybdenum: Leaves light green/ lemon yellow/orange. Spots on whole leaf except veins. Sticky secretions from under the leaf.</p>
<p>Magnesium: Paleness from leaf edges. No spots Edges have cup shaped folds. Leaves die and drop in extreme deficiency.</p>	<p>Potassium: Small spots on the tips, edges of pale leaves. Spots turn rusty. Folds at tips.</p>
<p>Phosphorus: Plant short and dark green. In extreme deficiencies turn brown or black. Bronze colour under the leaf.</p>	<p>Nitrogen: Stunted growth. Extremely pale color. Upright leaves with light green/yellowish. Appear burnt in extreme deficiency.</p>

THE COLOUR REPRESENTED ARE INDICATIVE. THEY MAY VARY FROM PLANT TO PLANT

Bits and Pieces

Split Pots

Have trouble getting your seedlings out of their pots when it comes time to transplant them? Don't want to damage the delicate roots. Then splitting your pots in half and sticking them together with duct tape can make removal really easy.

Watering

No matter how simple or complicated your watering system is, make sure it is consistent, especially through the Christmas and New Year holidays.



Sand

Having a base of sand for your pumpkin to grow on allows it to easily grow and it will reduce the likely hood of ending up with a concave bottom like it would if grown just on soil.

Seeds

There are now a selection of seeds for sale on the GPNZ site, I'm still tweaking a few things with it, but you can see what is already up there at;

www.giantpumpkins.co.nz/shop

Events

If you are running an event, make sure to send in your details to get them up on the site. Free advertising and be part of the NZ pumpkin community.

<http://www.giantpumpkins.co.nz/events/>

Dave's Garden Products

Dave's garden products are great for the grower who has a smaller patch, but want's great products to give good results.

The compost and fertiliser products come in different pack sizes, and all the products come with free shipping.

Dave's Ultra Concentrated

Compost - A great source of organic material, it also contain slow release humate, humic and fluvic acids.

Dave's Organic Liquid Compost - Helps stimulate and increase the soil biology.



Dave's Growth Booster Pellets

Add valuable carbon to your soil with pelletised 80/20 mix of sheep manure and humate.

This is just a brief overview of the products, make sure to check out the website, and if you have any questions make sure to say hi to Dave.

www.davesgardenproducts.co.nz

Dave's Liquid Fertiliser

Helps boost plant vigour, containing fish and seaweed, it provides plant available nutrients.

GPNZ YouTube Channel



Did you know that Giant Pumpkins NZ has a YouTube Channel?

Well it does and just recently I've been giving it a tidy up, removing old videos that are no longer relevant and started to make new videos.

In fact my plan is to release a new video every 2nd Monday, either an instructional video about an aspect of giant pumpkin growing or part of my Vlog series where I document what I am up to on my own

and other people's pumpkin journey.

Make sure to check out the channel, comment like and share anything you find useful.



“you never know you

might meet

some

awesome

giant pumpkin

growers”

Instagram and Twitter

As many of you are probably away Giant Pumpkins NZ is on Facebook, but you may not know we are on Instagram and Twitter too.



While all these social networks can sure be time consuming or confusing to keep up with, each network has different advantages and some people prefer ones over others.

Through both the Twitter and Instagram platforms I've been able to connect to growers from



around the world and see how their seasons have been growing.

If you love taking pictures and sharing them, then Instagram is the place for you.

If you like short conversations and interacting with people more then Twitter might be a good fit for you.

No matter what social network you use, you can chat, message, and share photos on all of them.

Have a play and see what works for you, they are all free and you never know you might meet some awesome giant pumpkin growers.





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The aim of Giant Pumpkins NZ is to help new and seasoned growers by providing information they will find useful.

From information about growing, products, events or just interesting people all of this is provided via the website and the Facebook page. Helping the giant pumpkin growing community grow here in New Zealand.

Thanks for subscribing to the newsletter.

www.giantpumpkins.co.nz

Next Issue Due Out - January 2018

Thanks for subscribing to The Pumpkin Post. There is so much to cover on giant pumpkin especially at the start of the season, hopefully this issue has given you something to think about. Make sure to check out the website for more info and more updates between newsletters.

Advertise

Want to advertise your product or service in the next newsletter?

Contact me via the details above to discuss options.

Write an article

Do you have something you want to share with the other giant pumpkin growers here in NZ and abroad? Get in touch.

