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July 2018 Newsletter

Welcome to the July edition of the pumpkin post newsletter, now is the time to get excited about the upcoming season. With seed selection and patch prep your priority right now it won't be long until you have a plant sprawled out across the ground and deciding on which pumpkin to keep.

Welcome to all the new people taking up the challenge of growing a giant pumpkin for the 2019 season, or maybe wanting to up their game and get better results at their local weigh off or competition. Thanks for being part of this great community that is stretching across the country.

As always there is a lot of excitement around even before our season kicks off. Due to us being awesome and living in the future at

the bottom of the world, we get to see what the Northern Hemisphere growers are up to and we get to see if the world record of 1190.5kg will be beaten later this year.

I Cover how you can keep up with the rest of the pumpkin growing world later in this issue.

What is your goal this year? A 50kg pumpkin? 200kg? Over 500kg? Or just something you can take to a competition. No matter what your goal is, remember there are lots of other people out there going through the same troubles and thoughts you may be going through. Giant pumpkin growers are a friendly bunch of

people, if you have a question no matter how big or how small, make sure to ask to get some advice and increase your knowledge.

What does it take to a grow a winning giant pumpkin?

Giant pumpkin growing is one of those hobbies the more you put in the more you will get out of it, both in pumpkin size and self growth.

So no matter where you are in your growers journey, try to add to what you have already done or know and as the imaginary song playing in my head states, "lets get this pumpkin season started"



Sam

Seed Importation

If you want to grow the best giant pumpkin, you will need to get the best seeds you can.



These will come from other growers. With such a small base of growers here in NZ, getting seeds from growers in the Northern Hemisphere can be a great option.

But... there is a process to getting the seeds into New Zealand. For the seeds themselves you can either buy them from an online retailer like:

Holland's Giants



Wallace WOW



World Class Gardening

WorldClassGardening.com

Or a grower might send you some if you ask nicely, either way the process works as follows:

You will need to get your seeds sent to Eddy in Canada, either to his US postal address or his Canadian postal address, depending on where your seeds originated from.

You will need to fill out this form on the GPNZ website:

SEED IMPORTATION PAGE



Eddy's US and Canadian postal address can be found on the seed importation page.

This lets Eddy know what he is expecting to show up. The cut off for this is the **1st of August.**

Eddy gets the phytosanitary certificate created and sends all the seeds in one package to NZ, once it gets here they will be sent out to each grower. There is no cost for the certificate and shipping which we are really grateful for.



This has worked for us very well for the last couple of years. Occasionally some seeds don't make it to NZ, usually from not passing the inspection at the certificate stage, Eddy will usually cover this issue with an alternative seed.

Feel free to get in touch if you have any questions around this process

Fieldays 2018

Another year and another New Zealand National Agricultural Fieldays® was held here in Hamilton. This year was special for Fieldays as it was the 50th year, which is such an achievement, especially with how much work must go into organising it.



With over 130,000 people through the gates over 4 days, it's easy to see why it is the largest agricultural event in the Southern Hemisphere. I try and check it out when I can, and this year it was slightly different as I had managed to get my hands on a 4 day pass.

There is a lot of things to see at Fieldays, and to help plan your day out and find your way around the Fieldays app sure was handy.

My goal at Fieldays is to find and talk to anyone that has some sort of product or idea that could be used in growing giant pumpkins.



This year I caught up with Marco again from [Crafty Gatherer](#) who I had met last year showing off their range of broad forks.



Broad forks make light work of patch prep and come in a variety of sizes for whatever area you have.

With no ongoing costs, good for the environment and able to cover large areas with relative ease broad forks are a perfect product for anyone that is keen on gardening.



You can find out all the information about the broad forks over on the [Crafty Gatherer](#) website.



My Noke who is a world leader in vermicomposting technology was a new company to me. I caught up with them after connecting with them via their [Instagram account](#).

My Noke is all about worm castings, worm castings are different to compost, something a lot of people don't realise. My Noke is able to supply worm castings either in bulk or in 10kg bags, ideal for when you have a small patch.

With over 30 years of experience, MyNOKE® vermicast and vermicompost are cost effective soil conditioners and fertilisers for your farm or orchard. Delivering plant available nutrients, essential micro-nutrients, natural plant growth hormones, active fungi and bacteria, nutrient unlocking enzymes, and the best soil humus to boost your most valuable asset. Pure earthworm casting will take the overall performance of your soil to its true potential.

They have great resources on their website for you to learn all about the vermicomposting and how it can be beneficial to many different industries. Find out more at: www.mynoke.co.nz

Fieldays 2018

While seaweed based fertilisers are very common right now, there are many new products coming out that have added items to give the



New Zealand Seaweeds were there as well, with a couple of different divisions which supply different products one division was called Kō fert and the other was Kōlush

Kōfert has two products in range: Kōfert Bio-Base and Kōfert Bio-Plus find out about these two products and all the info on their website: www.kofert.co.nz

Kōlush is all about garden mulch with two product lines available which are: Kōlush Mānuka garden mulch and Kōlush Mānuka + Seaweed garden mulch



You can find out more about these products by heading over to the Kōlush website at <http://www.kolush.co.nz>

I also came across Biom NZ Fertilisers they have some interesting products, including their take on a seaweed fertiliser, but the more interesting one that caught my eye was the Biom Trinity Bamboo Biochar Micro-organic Fertiliser.

I suggest visiting their website to find out about the complete range of products Biom NZ has.

www.biomax.co.nz/



Dave's Garden Products was there as well, I met Dave at last years Fieldays. Dave has a range of seaweed fertilisers that are made to help improve the condition of your soil. Available on the Dave's Garden Products website and also at participating stockists.

www.davesgardenproducts.co.nz

While there are a lot of products out there, many more than you will actually need, it is always good to see many different options out there for your giant pumpkin patch or home garden.

When the world record giant pumpkin record is broken here in NZ and I fully believe it will in the near future, I wonder if it will come down to a combination of great NZ made products not seen anywhere else.

If you have never been to Fieldays before I highly recommend it, it's a great event with many many different exhibitors there, and even if you your not planning on buying anything, it is always nice to dream about some of the machinery and other things on display.

Here are a couple of other random photos of at Fieldays this year.



Factors for giant pumpkin growth

There are two areas that impact how big a giant pumpkin can get, these are broken down into environmental factors and genetic factors.



Environmental factors are all the factors any gardener has to contend with: Sunlight, temperature, watering, fertilising etc, and in most cases the grower can have some control over all of these areas.

Genetics just like with humans can be a bit trickier with certain traits being passed down through the generations.

Pumpkin plants also have the ability to self pollinate, pumpkins are produced

when pollen from the male plant finds it's way onto the female flowers, which contain hundreds of ovules. One pollen grain + one ovule = one seed.

Making sure this pollination is controlled is a big part of controlling one factor in the giant pumpkin process.



One thing to keep in mind when talking about genetics in pumpkin seeds is that the pollen that is fertilising the flower has no effect on the growing pumpkin.

The DNA from this pollen is passed onto the seed that will be inside this pumpkin. This is a super interesting point as when you make a cross you are actually preparing the genetics of the

next generation of the pumpkin.

With lots of growers wanting to grow the next "hot" seed, there are probably lots of unknown unproven seeds out there with the potential to do amazing things.

Keeping track of and controlling the cross is super important to know what you can expect to see from any type of seed.

Tools like tools.pumpkinfanatic.com/ are super important to check out especially when purchasing giant pumpkin seeds or deciding on what seeds to plant if a choice has to be made.

Picking the best seed/s you can and providing the best environment possible will give you the greatest results, all mixed in with a bit of luck as well.

Giant Pumpkin Events

Is your giant pumpkin really a giant pumpkin if it can't be judged with its pumpkin peers?

Do you want to connect with other giant pumpkin growers in your area, support your local community and have a lot of fun? If yes, then you need to know where to take your giant pumpkin to.

More and more giant pumpkin events are popping up all over the country every year which is super exciting.

Luckily for you I add all the

pumpkin events I can find to the website under the [Events Section](#).

This year things are a bit different, I've made the events section easier to navigate, better to feast your eyes upon and better for all the organisers of pumpkin events.

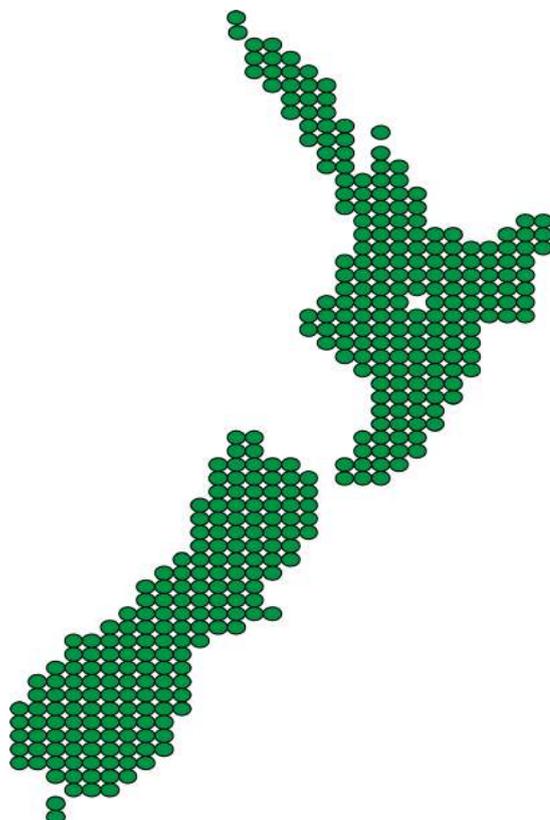
You can see the events page [right here on the website](#).

And if you are running a giant pumpkin event in 2019 you need to have your event listed on the website, why you may be asking?

Well it's free advertising, it helps people find your events details and where to go and it helps when people do a search on Google.

If you want to know more about running a giant pumpkin event, make sure to grab a free copy of my [guide to running a giant pumpkin event](#).

If you want your event listed on the website [fill out this form](#) and get in touch. If you know an event I don't have listed please let me know.



BigPumpkins.Com

If you want to take your giant pumpkin growing to the next level, you need to hang out where all the top growers in the world hangout, BigPumpkins.com

Since 1999 this has been the website where questions have been asked, diary entries have been made and giant pumpkin growing has been pushed to levels once thought unimaginable.



It's **FREE** to join, and once you have your login you can reply and ask questions on the forum, which is a great way to get advice from seasoned growers.

Posting into your own growers diary lets you post updates on your patch as the season goes, and is an ideal way of tracking your growing season each year.

Chat with other growers from around the world in the chat room and take part in the yearly seed auctions, getting great seeds at a good price while helping out other

growers and clubs at the same time, and now that you know how seeds get sent to New Zealand there is no reason not to get your hands on some great genetics.

There is always something to find on BigPumpkins.com and if you are wanting to boost your knowledge this is a great place to spend a few minutes or hours.

Issue the Challenge

Do you remember the excitement of growing your first giant pumpkin? Do you remember wondering how big this vegetable could get? If you do, and I am sure you do as I get that feeling every year, why not help other people feel that too?

Issue the Challenge

Find out who would be keen to have a friendly competition? Family, workmates, friends, they could be your biggest competition and there is nothing like growing against people you know.

Some people won't be keen

Sure there will be people that would have tried it before in the past, either without great success or only something they did with the

kids. Other people will be very quick to tell you they don't have enough room to grow a giant pumpkin, luckily you don't need much room.

But to be fair, don't waste your energy on people that like to say no a lot. Find people that want to give things a go, get them excited and have a great competition.

Come up with your own prizes, or put a bet on who has the largest or smallest pumpkin. There are lots of fun things you can do when the competition is amongst people you know.

If everybody did this, the small

community of giant pumpkin growers in NZ will slowly grow, eventually everyone will be growing 500+kg pumpkins.

And to me that isn't such a bad thing.



Cation Exchange Capacity

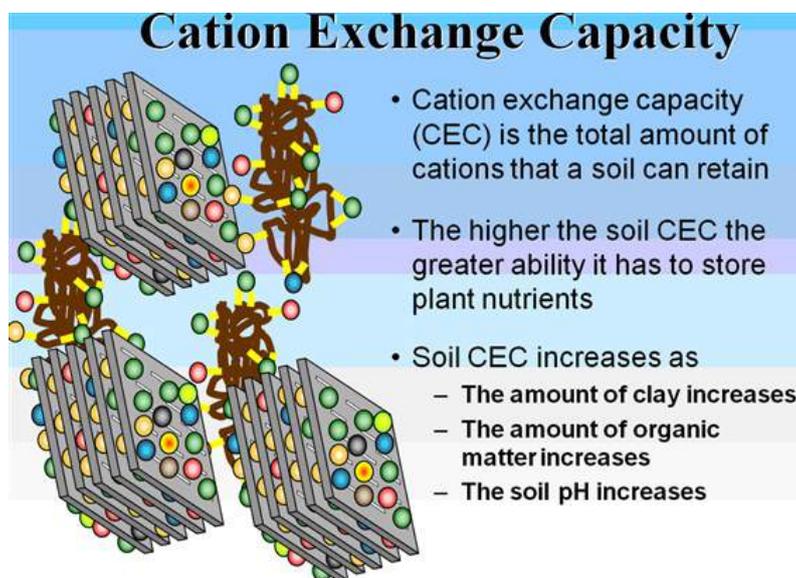
In this article I am going to explain what Cation Exchange Capacity is, how it can effect your patch and what you can do help fix it.

Cation Exchange Capacity or CEC for short is related to how plants take on the nutrients presented to them, from sources already found in the soil, fertilisers and organic matter.

Fertilisers, organic matter or anything the plant can use has to be broken down to a state the plant can absorb and use it. Liquid fertilisers are good as they are usually fast acting and easily absorbed while slow release fertilisers take a lot longer to break down until they are in a usable state.

The fertiliser or organic matter once broken down into it's ionic state allows the plants to use these ions to build items such as hormones, enzymes, proteins, starches and other compounds they require to grow and thrive.

Great soil is able to hold onto these ions with minimal leaching. Minimal leaching gives the plants more time to use the available nutrients and less fertiliser can be used. The measurement of the soils ability to hold onto these nutritive ions is called Cation Exchange Capacity.



How is CEC measured?

The CEC rates the solid negative charge, a better negative charge will hold more positively charged ions which are called cations. A scale of between 0 which is low and 50 which is high is used. Values showing under 10 are soils that have poor cation holding ability.

Cation Exchange Capacity

How different soils compare?

Clay based soils have a higher CEC as the particles in clay are negatively charged. At the other end of the scale is sand, which has little to no charge at all. CEC is higher in soils that have good levels of organic matter and micro-organisms which are an important part of a healthy soil food web can help improve the CEC.

Mycorrhizal fungi is one such micro-organism as they can help break down fertilisers and organic matter into their ionic components.



Other issues with CEC

A soil that has a high CEC can be buffered against changes in soil nutrients, which is good if you have good levels of soil nutrients and pH level. But the flip side of that is it can be more difficult if you need to make changes to the levels in your soil, and more product might be needed than in lower CEC soils.

Soils with a low CEC are more likely to develop deficiencies in potassium (K⁺), magnesium (Mg²⁺) and other cations while high CEC soils are less susceptible to leaching of these cations.

There are two practical ways to increase the ability of soils to hold nutrient cations such as potassium, calcium etc.

- Add organic matter
- If the soil is too acidic, use lime to raise its pH to the high end of the range needed for the crops you grow.

One of the benefits of liming acid soils is increasing soil CEC. Here's why: As the pH increases, so does the CEC of organic matter as well as some clay minerals. As hydrogen (H⁺) on humus is neutralized by liming, the site where it was attached now has a negative charge and can hold Ca⁺⁺, Mg⁺⁺, K⁺, etc.

In conclusion

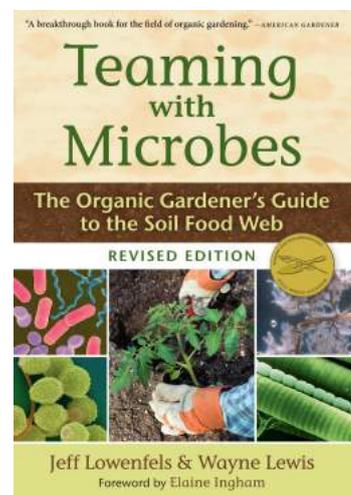
Cation Exchange Capacity is another part of the intricate make up of soil that you

should be aware of. A soil test can show you your CEC.

This is just a small section covering the vast complexities of soil. If you are serious about increasing your giant pumpkins weight, learning about soil is the number one key to great results.

This is what separates the pro growers from the beginners, understanding how important the soil is, and making the patch the perfect condition for growing giant pumpkins.

A great book I recommend reading to start learning more about soil, how it works and the importance of it is *Teaming With Microbes*.



Advice for New Growers

What is the best advice to give new giant pumpkin growers?

Everyone has their own advice they like to give, here's what I tell people that are starting out.

Try not to overdo everything, while it might seem like a great idea to dump a bunch of fertiliser onto the patch you may in fact just be wasting product and could be doing more harm than good to the plant. You'd be surprised at some of the amounts people tell me they have been dumping onto their patch.

The same can be said for watering, don't over water, over watering can water log the soil, prevent aeration and be washing away important nutrients.



Do what you can - Sometimes it can be overwhelming seeing what a champion giant pumpkin grower is doing during their season.

Remember everyone started somewhere, so take your time, learn to read your plant and build on your knowledge every year, from trying new things and talking to other growers and start tapping into the amazing resources available to you online.

What is your top advice for new growers? Let me know.

NZ Pumpkin History



PONDEROUS PUMPKINS: FOUR LARGE SPECIMENS GROWN AT POHANGINA, WELLINGTON DISTRICT.
S. S. Lucas, Photo.

Photo acknowledgement goes to: Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, AWNS-19140618-44-2

This photo first appeared 18th of June 1914 in a supplement that was in the Auckland Weekly News.

Facebook is Growing

I am the first to admit I have a love/hate relationship with Facebook.

I hate how creepy it can be with the amount of information it wants, and have you ever seen a super specific ad on Facebook related to something you were just talking about?



No matter what you think about Facebook the real area it shines are the many Facebook groups.

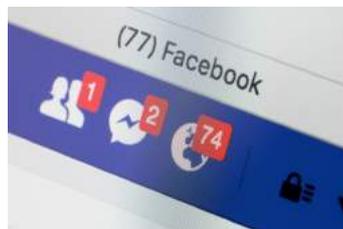
With so many people posting so many interesting things within these super specific groups, it's the easiest way to learn a new skill or get advice when you need it.

Giant pumpkin growing is no different, growers are posting photos and answering questions every day.

But what happens if you don't have Facebook?

That is an interesting question, but the one you

really should be asking is why don't you have Facebook?



There can be many reasons why you don't want it, privacy concerns, other people annoying you, or maybe you don't want all the notifications.

But if you don't have Facebook you are in a great position to start using it.

Way back in the day everyone that signed up for Facebook would share everything and anything on the platform, in fact many people still do.

Starting fresh with Facebook means you can control everything, you can control how much you tell Facebook, how much information you put on there, all while being part of groups.

So while this can seem scary, it is manageable, there are great guides out on the Internet around this, the benefits of being on Facebook in some capacity to be able to get quick easy

access to information from multiple people can outweigh the negatives of it.

Facebook Groups to Check out.

Here is a list of Facebook groups related to giant pumpkin growing you should check out.

[Backyard Giant Pumpkin Growers](#)

[Giant Pumpkins& watermelons& marrows Growers of The World](#)

[Giant Vegetable Community](#)

[GIANT PUMPKIN GROWERS](#)

[Utah Giant Pumpkin Growers](#)

Let me know of any other groups I have missed to I can share them in the next edition.

As well as groups, you can connect directly with giant pumpkin growers from around the world.

Finding them is as easy as typing their name and asking to be their friend on Facebook.

Next Issue - October

Thanks for reading this edition of The Pumpkin Post, I hope you found something of value contained within it. Feel free to share this with anyone you think would like it and if there is something you would like to see in a future edition please let me know.

The next issue will be coming in early October. October is the traditional start time for giant pumpkins here in New Zealand.

All the things you need for the start of the season will be in the October issue. Keep an eye out for it in your inbox early October.



Giant Pumpkins NZ
www.giantpumpkins.co.nz

2A Radnor St
Hamilton Central
Hamilton
3204

0274260225
sam@giantpumpkins.co.nz

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.