

Hello fellow giant veggie growers!

Apparently, the unwritten rule is 'if you win a competition you are obligated to write an article for the club'. Well, the jokes on our leadership team as I can talk forever about pumpkins and gardening! This article highlights Dani and I (Gerry's) Team Gadberry return to giant pumpkin growing after a two-year hiatus while we moved back to our hometown in Eastern Washington.

For those members that are new to the club and may not know us Dani and I have been growing pumpkins since we were married in 1995. If you're interested in seeing some of the techniques we use check out our diaries in bigpumpkins.com they date back 20 years or so to the beginning of their website, we go by the user name Gadberry's. Here's a photo of a 1st place 1112# giant Dani grew at our Cheney Washington farm way back in 2006!



Our pumpkin growing return started in the summer of 2020 with the completion of our new farmhouse in Deer Park WA. We couldn't grow for the last couple of years after moving from our farm on the westside of the state because the real estate market was so hot in Spokane, we had to initially settle for a home in the Spokane Valley while we had the Deer Park farmhouse built. If anyone has ever lived in or visited the Spokane Valley, they know that the area soil is predominantly river rock and packed gravel. Impossible to grow world class veggies in that soil!

Our new 5-acre farm was built in the middle of an old alfalfa field and the soil is a nice sandy loam of crushed glacial rock created from the last ice age. We took a soil sample in the spring of 2020 and planted a big cover crop of Winter Rye as soon as we moved in. As soon as the rye started growing, we realized why they named the area "Deer Park". Much to our old Beagle Max's dismay we had a herd of 20 plus resident White Tail deer that very brazenly grazed the cover crop and new lawns to the dirt as fast as they could grow. We decided that if we were going to ever grow anything on the farm we would defiantly need to build a tall fence around the garden! We were able to get the new fence installed over the long snowy winter along with the first of three "homemade" custom 20' x 24' high tunnel greenhouses.



We grew three competition plants in 2021 using the traditional method of buried soil heating cables, 6' x 6' mini cloches and heating lamps with the exception of our fair pumpkin (a 2145 McMullen) that we grew in the new 20' x 24' high tunnel. The other two pumpkins were the 1911 Urena and a 1747.5 Handy. We added several hundred pounds of dolomitic lime the previous fall and tried to increase the macro and micronutrients in the spring but knew our soil was a long way from ideal. Some of the things we added that I believe really helped was 20 yards of very old, composted cow manure from a local rancher (Thank you Lone Crow Ranch), and 20 yards of custom blended compost from Marley's Worm Farm (Thanks Scott). We brought our old 12 zone solar powered fertigation system I built with us from our Battle Ground farm and used it for drip and overhead irrigation all summer with the built in Dosatron spoon feeding nutrients at a ratio of 400:1 every time it watered.

Our first 1911 Urena seed failed to germinate so I started my last 1911 Urena a week later. We lost our 1911 Urena pumpkin to a blossom end split in mid-July, the plant just didn't want to switch from the vegetative mode to the fruit growing mode. I blame myself as I pushed a lot of nitrogen early on to try and catch the replacement 1911 plant up.

Our 2145 was crossed with the 1747.5 Handy and grew nicely in the big hoop house until we harvested it in early September for the Spokane Interstate Fair. It took 1st place and set a new fair and county record at 1126 #.

Our 1747.5 Handy plant was a fun easy plant to grow and didn't wilt or burn even in the extreme record heat waves we experienced. It weighed 1527.5 and was 13% heavy to the chart, it was crossed with the 2145 McMullan and took 1st place at the Christensen Nursery weigh-off in Skagit Valley. This little beauty broke our old Spokane County record and set a new one!



Dani and I are always fascinated and humbled by the majesty of these giant beasts and look forward to seeing everyone again at next seasons weigh offs!

Thanks for reading our little article,

Gerry & Dani Gadberry