

Steve Daletas

Steve Daletas balances a busy life between family, piloting commercial airlines, and gardening. And not surprising, when that balance was tipped in 2002, he chose to suspend pumpkin growing — even though he had one of the best giant pumpkin performances of all time in 2001.

Living in the southern end of the Willamette Valley in Pleasant Hill, Oregon, where springs are cool and wet, and summers are mild, hovering between 75 and 85 degrees with a week or so in the mid 90's, Steve shines in some of the best growing conditions imaginable for crops requiring long seasons with temperate climate. Fall cools to the mid to upper 70's with first-frost holding out until late September — providing for substantial, late, weight gains — something we all crave everywhere else in North America.

Steve began growing giant pumpkins in the mid 1980's, but didn't really get a passion for it until he moved to the country, and a larger growing area, in 1998. He worked the soil that first year, and planted his first Atlantic Giants in 1999.

He's been married twenty years to Susie, and has two children, a 17 year old daughter Stacey and a 12 year old son Scotty, who all witnessed his growing prowess in 2001.

Actually, Scotty grows as well, and not only witnessed the season but grew his own 1075 pound pumpkin. The whole family pitches in with Steve's mom doing a lot of the pollinating and his daughter and bride doing the mandatory cheerleading. Steve says, "My daughter says she's embarrassed about her dad's obsession, but inside she really likes it." I can attest to the fact that any father that has both a teenage daughter and a love of pumpkin growing has heard that one before.

In October of 2001, Steve Daletas' name became very well known in giant pumpkin growing circles. The world record was Dave Stelts, 2000, 1140 pounder. In fact, up until the weigh offs in 2001, only two people had ever grown pumpkins over 1100 pounds, and both were world records — Gerry Checkon did it in 1999 with a 1131 pounder. 2001 would be a monumental year for giant pumpkin growing. I can only compare it to 1994 when no one had yet grown a pumpkin over 884 pounds, and four broke 900 pounds at the weigh offs. In 2001, Geneva Emmons broke the world record by a mind boggling 122 pounds — 1262 pounds, and adding to that excitement, and at the same time demonstrating the fact that 1200 pounds was the new level of giant pumpkin respectability, Craig Weir grew a 1260.4, Steve chipped-in with a 1230, and three other people broke the world record 1140 pounds set in 2000 (Paul Handy with an 1167, Al Eaton with an 1153, and Geneva Emmons again with an 1144).

pumpkin had a circumference of 194" (that's over 16' if you're too engrossed to do the math) and an estimated weight of 1470 pounds. No one had ever grown a pumpkin with those kind of measurements. Even though it was 16% below the estimated weight, the mere physical size of this pumpkin fueled the imaginations of giant pumpkin growers everywhere. Someone is going to grow a 1500 pound pumpkin, and it is likely to come sooner than anyone expected. 1500 pounds is no longer a fantasy number, it is something within grasp, and the next major barrier to break. Steve sees the 1500 pound pumpkin this way, "A few years ago my answer would have been no, but we've seen several pumpkins that, if they had just weighed "on chart," would have broken this barrier. With some seed [stocks] weighing heavy, like they are now, I see the 1500 pound mark falling soon. The upper limit? It's anyone's guess?"

Steve is one of the new breed of competitive giant pumpkin growers that has opted for growing smaller, more carefully pruned plants. His plants typically measure 500 - 600 square feet, and his preferred pruning method is the Christmas Tree. He also uses a double primary vine method that I've called the "wishbone" in

Steve's 1230 also added a new dimension to how growers would now begin to view the physical attributes of a world class giant pumpkin. Measuring 416 total inches using the over-the-top method of estimating weight, this



Daletas Family on way to the Canby, OR weigh off with the 2001, 1230



Steve with the 2001, 1230 cut open and revealed

the past. His 1230 was grown on a wishbone plant along with a 1016 pounder on the other primary. Steve says, "In my opinion, one plant can support more than one pumpkin."

Even though Steve took 2002 off, he spent the season sharing the excitement of growers who had chosen to grow his seeds. Five growers grew pumpkins over 1000 pounds and a sixth grew a 900 pounder from his seeds.

When asked what he feels is important, he answered, "I feel the soil is critical! If you don't take care of it, then the seed can't do what its capable of doing. So, I work hard to get it balanced! After that, [you have to spend a lot of] time in the patch! There is no substitute, from heated greenhouses in the spring to covers over the patch when the fall rains come."

More on what he calls "balanced" in the chapter – *Calcium*.



Above: Scotty and Steve pose for photographers with the 1230 at the Canby, OR weigh off. Left: Stacey, Susie, Steve & Scotty Daletas with the 2001, 1016 at the Half Moon Bay, CA weigh off.



Above: Steve and the 2000, 828; and an earlier photo of the Daletas' family – my how you've grown!

Right: Susie & Steve with the 2001, 1230; and Susie & Steve on a float with the 1016 at the Half Moon Bay parade.

