



TIM PARKS- WORLD CLASS GIANT PUMPKIN GROWER

Interview by Alan Gibson- Ohio Valley Giant Pumpkin Growers

It is a pleasure to interview world class giant pumpkin grower and club organizer Tim Parks of Salem, Ohio. Tim is the owner of Parks Garden Center specializing in gardening supplies, bird seed, greenhouse production and fall crops (thousands of mums and acres of gourds and field pumpkins). Tim enjoys waterfowl hunting with his black Labrador retriever, shooting clays and attending ball games. Tim and his wife, Sheila, are the proud parents of Christa (a nursing student at Youngstown State University) and Nick (a senior at South Range High School).

Tim was the founder of the Ohio Valley Giant Pumpkin Growers in 1995 when he secured the Great Pumpkin Commonwealth weigh-off site for Parks Garden Center in Canfield, Ohio. He has served as site coordinator and president of the club for the past sixteen years. Tim has seen the OVGPG grow from a fledgling group into one of the world's premier giant pumpkin clubs. His first act was to name Dick Baird, Alan Gibson, Ron Moffett and Jack Lanterman to the OVGPG board of directors.

The Ohio Valley Giant Pumpkin Growers has won the GPC "Top 10 Site Average" award four of the past five years. They conduct the annual summer tour and picnic, beginner's- advanced seminars and the weigh-off. Seed sales, internet seed auctions and newsletters round out the yearly events.

Tim served as a Great Pumpkin Commonwealth director for eight years. He was elected to the GPC Hall of Fame in 2006.

This past season, Tim grew his personal best pumpkin at 1571#, placing third at the prestigious OVGPG weigh-off. His 1395#er was third at Oakland Nursery and his 1208.5# and 1144.5# pumpkins took 2nd and 3rd at the Canfield Fair. Tim has placed pumpkins in the "Big 3" at the OVGPG weigh-off on three other occasions.

Before I cover how Tim grows his pumpkins, he wanted me to tell the readers that he is in no way an "expert" giant pumpkin grower. There is much more to learn about the hobby. He has learned from his experience as a greenhouse manager and commercial vine crop grower. There are still holes in the chemical and fertilizer programs that will require further research. A grower must be ready to change on the fly, making adjustments due to weather and allowing for new products and strategies.

PATCH SIZE (Layout) The Parks patch is 7200 square feet for the eight pumpkin plants (900 square feet per plant). The plants are spaced twenty feet apart- back to back. The pruning style would be the "spider" with 6-8' of main vine past the pumpkin. The side vines are 15'



long with tertiaries filling in the back ten feet of the plant. Each plant is fenced in for wind protection using black plastic snow fence (heavier duty than orange).

SOIL PREPARATION (Cover Crops) Tim starts his soil preparation two years ahead of planting. He applied 42 cubic yards of mushroom compost in the fall of 2008 for the 2010 crop. 800# of dolomitic limestone and 80# of 6-24-24 were also applied. That fall the soil was plowed and the compost tilled into the soil. The spring of 2009 the following were applied according to the Western Laboratories soil test: MAP (11-52-0), gypsum, sulphate of potash (0-0-50), Kmag (0-0-22 + 11% magnesium), chelated zinc and boron, calcium nitrate (15.5-0-0), granular kelp and granular humic acid. In June (2009), ten pounds of RTI's "Pumpkin Pro" mycorrhizae was applied to the patch. Fifty pounds of "Sudex" sudangrass was sown as a cover crop. The sudangrass is mowed at 3' and again at frost (to the ground). This patch started as virgin soil and was also subsoiled. The extra year of preparation allows the soil to mellow and the microbial activity to increase. Some of the advantages of the sudangrass cover crop are: 1) retards weed growth and weed seed production (weed bank) 2) increases organic matter 3) mycorrhizae colonize the roots so they are in place for the pumpkin crop

MYCORRHIZAE Ten pounds of RTI's "Pumpkin Pro" was also used by placing a pinch at each vine node as vine burying was done.

SOIL DISEASES-FOLIAR DISEASES-INSECT CONTROL The complete Parks program for disease and insect control can be found on the purple insert. Please save this for future reference.

SEED STARTING The seeds were started on April 24th using Fafard 4M soilless mix in 4 ½" tapered pots (black plastic). At seven days, the plants were transplanted to one gallon pots in Tim's commercial greenhouse. They are transplanted into the 4' x 6' huts about May 15th. The huts are covered with Agribon 30 row cover (provides 6 degrees frost protection). Styrofoam coolers are placed over the plants at night to provide extra warmth.

POLLINATION The 1571 Parks was grown using the 1385 Jutras seed. It was pollinated on June 23rd at 12' out on the main vine (5 segments). Final measurements totaled 432.5".

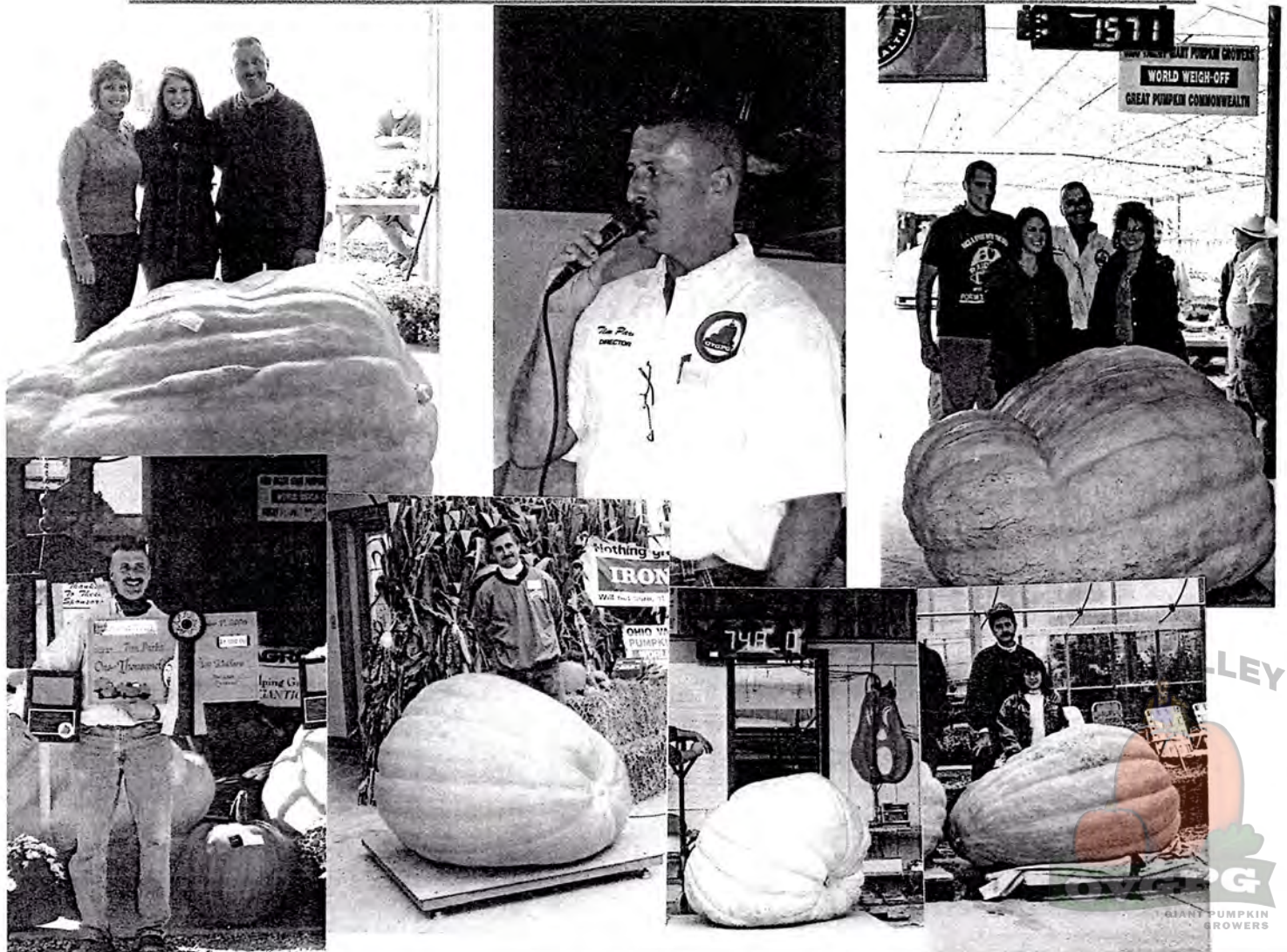
IRRIGATION Tim uses a combination of four whiz heads and four Toro rotary sprinklers in his overhead irrigation system. This gives total coverage while emphasizing the center of the plant. Pond water is pulled into the 1000 gallon plastic storage tank. 12-22 ounces of chlorine is added to the tank depending on the time of year and pond stagnation. The water is allowed to set for 2-3 hours so the chlorine can work. Tim uses 1000-1500 gallons per day on the eight plants when there is no rainfall. His soil is very well drained (24" deep sandy clay loam) and requires plenty of water. All chemical drenches are run through the irrigation system.



SEPTEMBER PROTECTION This was a warm September so no protection was needed. Normally, two pieces of row cover (reemay) are used to cover the plant on frosty nights (one piece on each side of the main vine). White sheets are used on the fruit for shade. Nylon ground covers are used under the fruit.

FERTILIZERS Spring ammendments were applied according to the March soil test. The same products as under "Soil Preparation" were used. A tissue test was done in mid- July to check on actual depletion of N-P-K and micronutrients. The following fertilizers were run through the overhead irrigation system (June and July) or sprayed on the soil (May): 1) chelated zinc- ½ oz./ 1000 square feet 2) boron-20 Mule Team Borax- 1/3 teaspoon/ 1000 square feet (apply on the soil in May or after the vines are 6' long in June) 3) chelated manganese- ½ oz./ 1000 square feet. In July, liquid calcium was applied at 18 ounces/ 1000 gallons of irrigation water. Kmag and calcium nitrate were also used according to the tissue test requirements. No fertilizers were used after August 1st.

Thanks to Tim Parks for sharing his growing success with us. He has served the Ohio Valley Giant Pumpkin Growers these past sixteen years as a world class leader, grower and ambassador of the hobby.



**Interview with Chris Stevens
(The 1810.5# WR Pumpkin)**

By Dave Rumancik



Can you give us some idea of your patch size and soil preparation?

I allowed each of six plants just under 700 sqft. Fall soil prep consisted of adding gypsum, manganese sulfate, Humic Acid and Residue (from Agri-Energy Resources). Spring soil prep included the addition of Kelp meal and Humic Acid. I'm on a 2 year rotation and cover crop the resting area with winter rye.

What seeds did you grow in 2010?

I grew the 1544.5 Revier, 1288 Wallace, 1421.5 Stelts, 1161 Rodonis, and two of my 1140's. I felt these seeds would have the potential to get very big while at the same time be heavy to the chart.

Can you explain your seed starting technique?

I file my seeds then soak them in a solution of seaweed (from North American Kelp) and BiotaMax (biggerpumpkin.com) for about 5 minutes then place the seeds directly in potting medium with a bit of seaweed and RTI-Mykos mixed with water. The seedling pots are then kept at about 90 degrees for germination. Seeds were started on 4/18 and put out into cold frames from 4/26 - 4/28.

Any special early season techniques?

I use heating cables in the soil. I also use heat lamps when temps fall below 40F. My hoops are about 4' x 5'.

What do you use for bug control?

I use merit in the soil and bifenthrin as a contact.

Can you explain your disease prevention program?

I use BiotaMax, Companion and Ridomil (subdue) as soil drenches. Aliette, Daconil, Kocide, and Eagle 20 are used as foliar sprays. I use Actinovate (Natural Industries) as a foliar



and drench. In my experience Actinovate seems to be effective as a root disease preventative, and also effective against powdery mildew as a foliar spray.

Can you tell us about your watering methods?

I use simple overhead watering straight from a well. I have a timer that I customize depending on how much rain we have received. I also hand water in areas that the sprinklers cannot reach.

How was the weather this year?

The season started out very cold, then from the end of June through August it was very hot, wet and humid. Overall I'd say we had way too much rain.

Do you do any fertilizing during the season?

During the season I foliar spray fish (Neptunes Harvest) and seaweed (North American Kelp) weekly or as I feel needed. I also use compost tea as time allows.

Can you share your pruning strategy and vine burying technique?

I use a variation of the Christmas tree. All 6 plants grew back to back and had slightly different pruning methods. On 1161 I didn't allow much growth past the fruit except the main. I swept some of the vines nearest the fruit forward and toward the end of the patch. RTI-Mykos was used while burying the vines throughout the season.

How much time do you spend in the patch?

Between June and mid August I'd estimate I'm in the patch about 2 hours a day.

How do you protect / shade the fruit?

I use mill fabric and sand under the fruit. For sun shading I use a white sheet.

Can you give us the cross of the 1810.5 and measurements?

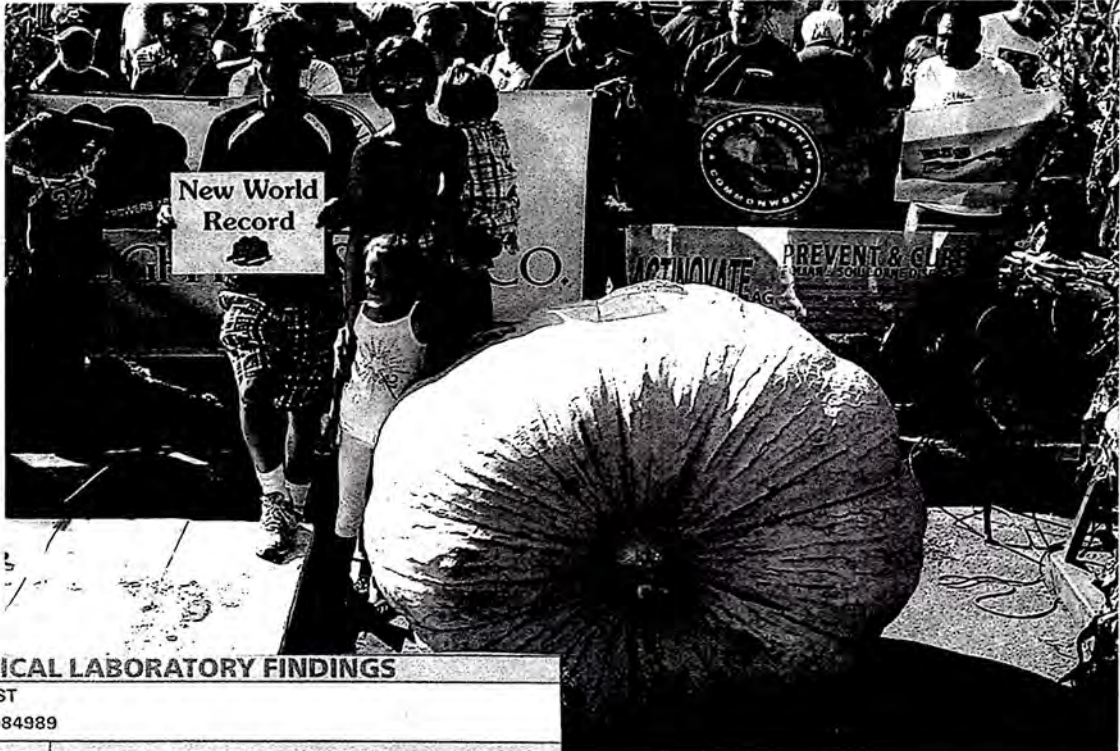
The 1810.5 Stevens 2010 is the 1161.0 Rodonis x 1421.5 Stelts. The estimated weight was 1540.7 which went 17.51 percent heavy. The measurements were cc: 186.5, ee: 116.5, ss: 116.5. It was a 5 lobed fruit that was pollinated on 6/27 13 feet out on the main. My 1421 weighed 1468.5 and would have been much bigger had it not foamed up and lost a bunch of main mid August.

Any guesses as to seed selection for 2011?



Though I change my mind daily at this point I'd like to grow the 1810.5 Stevens, 1468 Stevens, 1161 Rodonis, 1325 Hopkins, 1596 Werner, 1421.5 Stelts, 1561 Stevens, 1605 Sweet, and the 1725 Harp.

The OVGPG would like to thanks Chris for his time for this quick peak into his remarkable season.



ANALYTICAL LABORATORY FINDINGS

SAMPLE IDENTIFICATION		WEST				
LABORATORY NUMBER		20984989				
ANALYTE	UNITS	RESULTS	LOW	MEDIUM	OPTIMUM	V. HIGH
Organic Matter	%	3.9				
Nitrate-N	lbs/A	14				
P ₂ Phosphorus	lbs/A	119				
Water Sol P	lbs/A	11				
P ₂ Phosphorus	lbs/A	220				
Bicarb-P	lbs/A					
Potassium	lbs/A	614				
Water Sol K	lbs/A	200				
Calcium	lbs/A	2459				
Water Sol Ca	lbs/A	335				
Magnesium	lbs/A	547				
Water Sol Mg	lbs/A	83				
Sulfur	lbs/A	43				
Water Sol S	lbs/A	38				
Zinc	ppm	5.0				
Manganese	ppm	5				
Iron	ppm	39				
Copper	ppm	1.2				
Boron	ppm	1.4				
Sodium	lbs/A	85				
Water Sol Na	lbs/A	76				
Soluble Salts	mmhos/cm	0.4				
Excess Lime Rt	L	L				
pH		6.8				
Br ₂ Index						
C ₂	meq/100g	10.4				
Base Saturation	Desired					
Percent K	2-5%	8.4				
Percent Mg	12-13%	24.4				
Percent Ca	65-75%	65.2				
Percent H	0-12%	0.0				
Percent Na	< 1.5%	2.0				

