

Christy Harp – World Record Pumpkin Grower
Interview by Alan Gibson
Ohio Valley Giant Pumpkin Growers

Congratulations to Christy Harp of Massillon, Ohio for exhibiting the new world record pumpkin (1,725#) at the Ohio Valley Giant Pumpkin Growers weigh-off on October 3, 2009.

Christy is 27 years old and teaches math at Jackson High School. She is the assistant cross country coach at the school. Along with her husband and growing partner, Nick, they enjoy geocaching (involves a GPS and lots of hiking) and traveling. The mountains of Alaska and Montana are a few of their favorite spots. They have also included some pumpkin travel with visits to the Pacific Northwest and Rhode Island. Nick is a chemical engineer with Goodrich Rubber Co. in Akron, Ohio. Both are graduates of the University of Akron.

It was quite a year at the Harp garden in 2009. In addition to the world record pumpkin, Christy grew a 1,236 pound pumpkin and Nick grew his personal best 1,316 pounder. Seeds have been much sought after, as the 1,725 was the pollinator of all three pumpkins.

The Harp garden also produced the following: 1) five tomatoes ranging from 4-7#, 2) six long gourds over 100" grown on the same plant, 3) a cantaloupe over 29#, 4) a Connecticut Field Pumpkin at 95.5# and 5) a 94# watermelon. Christy was named the "Grand Exhibitor" at the OVGPG weigh-off.

Nick and Christy, along with Dave and Carol Stelts, appeared on NBC's "Today Show" on October 19th. Christy will soon be recognized by the "Guinness Book of World Records". She will be receiving her orange jacket and trophy at the Niagara Falls Growers Convention on March 13th. Christy will be speaking at this convention and also at the OVGPG's "Growers Gathering and Seminar" on March 20th. She is the only member of the 1,700# Club and the youngest person to ever be the world champion.

PATCH SIZE (Layout)

Christy and Nick's pumpkin patch is 7,200 square feet. They each grow four plants (three are watered and the fourth not so much). Each plant covers 900 square feet. They are on a three year rotation. The plants are grown back to back (20' apart) with a walkway down the middle. The first two side vines on each side are angled back toward the walkway and the rest is filled in with tertiaries. The 1,725# world record pumpkin was set on the main vine at 9.5'. The 9' of vines behind the stump made a total of 18.5' behind the fruit.

All of the vines were buried including the main vine for wind protection. Crossed wire hangers are used to secure vines. No fences are used.

SOIL PREPARATION

Fall preparation starts with several sprays of Roundup to eliminate weeds and grasses. The area is chisel plowed and soil tested. Twenty cubic yards of compost were added plus 50# of humic acid. A winter rye cover crop was grown.

This spring the following soil amendments were added to the 7,200 square foot patch: 1) another 50# of humic acid, 2) 50# Kelp, 3) 30# DAP (18-46-0), 4) 60# SulPOMag (0-0-22 + magnesium), 5) 30# ammonium sulphate (21-0-0 + 24% sulphur), 6) 30# calcium nitrate (15.5-0-0), 7) 30# micronutrient

mix, 8) 50# dolomitic limestone and 9) 50# gypsum. They were shooting for 5# of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet.

This was based on a March soil test from Western Labs (Phone: 800-658-3858). The values were:

Ph	6.9 (neutral)	Organic Matter	3.48% (medium)
Nitrates	8 ppm (low)	Zinc	2.5 ppm (adequate)
Ammonium	2 ppm (low)	Copper	0.8 ppm (low)
Phosphorus	23 ppm (low)	Manganese	13 ppm (adequate)
Potassium	133 ppm (low)	Iron	91 ppm (very high)
Sulphate	15 ppm (low)	Boron	0.9 ppm (adequate)
Calcium	1,771 ppm (low)	Magnesium	192 ppm (low)
Sandy Loam Soil	Cation Exchange Capacity (CEC) – 11		

The soil sample was pulled using a stainless steel soil probe at 8.10" deep. This probably gives a more accurate test than the shovel method. Samples were collected at random spots in the patch and not just the planting sites.

After the amendments were spread, the patch was subsoiled and disced. No rototilling was done for the rest of the year. Christy uses a stirrup hoe to control small weeds on her side of the patch. Nick uses a broadfork to loosen compaction ahead of burying vines on his plants. Roundup is used as needed to help control weeds and grasses away from the plants.

COMPOST

The Harps have access to the farm equipment from making and spreading compost. The compost consists of leaves, manure and coffee ground. Twenty cubic yards of finished compost were spread the previous fall.

MYCORRHIZAE

The Harps used 5# of RTI's "Symbiosis Pumpkin Pro" mycorrhizae. This was sprinkled in the trenches when burying the vines. No Rootshield or other biological were used.

SOIL DISEASES

Agri-Phos has been used the past four years (replaces Aliette/ Chipco Signature) to help prevent phythium. It is used as a foliar spray and drench. The Harps drench by spraying shortly before a rainfall. No overhead watering is done as drip irrigation has been used for the past two years. Other chemicals used in the drench program are Topsin M (Clearys 3336) and Subdue (Ridomil).

No foaming stumps have been observed perhaps due to the lower organic matter levels.

SEED STARTING

The seeds were started on April 29th. They were filed and soaked in a water/ hydrogen peroxide mix for a short time. The seedlings are grown in two gallon pots for 10-12 days using ProMix. A small greenhouse with space heater is attached to their home for seed starting.

The plants were transplanted on May 10th. Plastic huts (6' x 8') and Styrofoam coolers were used to protect the seedlings. Clear plastic was placed on the growing sites several weeks ahead of time to both warm the soil and keep it dry. This raises the soil temperature 10 degrees F.

INSECT CONTROL

The two chemicals used were Provado (Merit) and generic Talstar. They were rotated every other spray.

POLLINATION

The 1,725# Harp was grown using the 1,385 Jutras seed. It was pollinated on June 26th. The 1,385# Jutras plant was triple the size of the others on late June. It was a four segment female, 9.5' out on the main vine.

Final measurements were: circumference – 202.5", side to side – 116.75" and long – 114.25". The total was 433.5" for and estimated weight of 1,702# (1.35% heavy).

FOLIAR DISEASES

The Harps spray with a Stihl backpack sprayer (SR 420) every 7-10 days depending on the weather and work schedule. Bravo (Daconil) and Kocide (Copper) are the two main fungicides rotated. Also mixed in at various times are: Topsin M (Clearys 3336), Nova (Eagle), and Pristine (Strobilin mixture). A spreader sticker is also added along with seaweed and 10-8-8 liquid fertilizer.

DRIP IRRIGATION

Well water is used for irrigation with not holding tanks involved. The drip tape spacing is 12" apart on the tape with 18" between the tapes. Last year's tape put out 0.45 gallon/ minute/ 100 feet of tape. This year's tape will put out 0.22 gallon/ minute/ 100 feet of tape.

During dry periods, each plant receives 80 gallons of water per day on the 900 square feet. Each plant is a "zone" and a timer allows the plant to be watered several times per day to reach the 80 gallons.

The Harps agree that drip irrigation has greatly increased their pumpkin weights these past two years.

FERTILIZERS

All of the fertilizers were spread as soil amendments in the spring and worked into the soil. The only fertilizer in the season was the seaweed and 10-8-8 tank mixed with the spray program.

SEPTEMBER PROTECTION

A tarp was placed on the 1,725# fruit when rain was forecast. It was removed afterwards. Reemay was used twice when frost was expected and then removed. White sheets were used from an early age to protect the fruit.

A two inch layer of sand with the white ground cover was used under the pumpkin. This keeps the bottom flat and provides drainage.

WEATHER

The weather was cool and dry during May, June and July. This pumpkin weighed 335# on Day 30 (July 26th) which is 100# behind schedule on Ohio. August (985#) and September (280#) were very good months for growing.

Thanks to Christy and Nick for sharing their growing success with us. They have served the Ohio Valley Giant Pumpkin Growers as pumpkin regatta coordinators, weigh-off helpers and summer tour hosts. They are both great ambassadors of our hobby of growing giant pumpkins.