

2018 UK giant pumpkin record holders, twin brothers, Ian and Stuart Paton of Lymington, Hants, UK took some time to answer questions from PNWGPG reporter Gerry Gadberry. This article will appear in our newsletter and on our website for our members. Thank you for your contributions Ian and Stuart, we appreciate the time you have taken to share some of your knowledge and growing techniques with us!



1: What got you started in this hobby and how long have you been growing giants?

Ian and I started growing when we were 13 years old. We were the only kids that couldn't wait to get home from our summer holiday to see how big our pumpkin was. It weighed in at 54lb. Forty four years later we are still trying to break the world record.

2: What is your typical weather like and how big is your growing area?

We grow under glass so the weather doesn't affect us too much when it's a little cold we add some heat and when it's too bright we use our shade screens. We grow 6 plants every year and each plant has 1100 square feet.

3: Can you describe your soil type and typical amendments, cover crops, and patch prep techniques you use?

We made our own light airy soil and use a digger to double dig. We have usable soil twice the normal depth. Last year we decided our soil didn't have enough AFP (air filled porosity) and added around 200 cubic ft coir and 200 cubic ft course perlite per patch. We do a soil test in the spring and add the recommended fertiliser to correct the soil.

4: What is your water source, how much water do you typically use a week and do you use "fertigation" to inject nutrients into the water?

We use water from our bore hole. We have twelve moisture probes under one of our patches which are linked to a computer. They give us extra information about how much water is in the soil at different levels. We water every day and slowly increase or decrease the amount per day. The last thing we want is no water one day and lots the next. At the height of the season we put on 100 gallons/day. We do a soil test every 10 days and use straight fertilisers to micro adjust. We want enough of each nutrient but no more. For instance we want our potassium to be 400ppm. If it goes any lower we use a little potassium nitrate to correct it. We definitely don't want it any higher the plant doesn't need it and it will make the conductivity higher. The saltier the soil is the harder it is for the plant to suck up water and we want our plants to suck up water like no tomorrow. Other straight fertilisers we generally use are Borax, calcium nitrate and manganese sulphate.

5: Your 174 stone (2433.9 lb.) 2018 UK Southampton Festival winner was an amazing accomplishment, was it grown under a greenhouse or outdoors? How did you decide on what seeds to grow and do you think the World Record will be beat this year?

Our 2433 was grown in the glasshouse. We tend to sow one proven seed per patch and back it up with unproven seeds with good genetics. Our view is that there is a very good chance the World record will be broken this year.

6: What does your fertilizer / fungicide / insect program typically look like? Are you organic gardeners, commercial fertilizer users or both and is you're fertilizing based on tissue and soil tests?

Growing inside means that the bad bugs can get out of hand. It does however give us a chance to use good bugs to go after the bad ones. In the commercial world we use "integrated pest control" which means we use good bugs where possible and supplement with chemicals where necessary. We and our customers accept a level of pests and the damage caused by them. In the pumpkin house however we have a zero tolerance on bad bugs and we flood the

house with the good guys. We use *Steinernema feltiae* (nematodes), *Hypoaspis* and Athens Beetles to control [Scariad](#) flies.

Eretmocerus eremocerus to control white fly.

We spray with Dynamec to control red spider.

We spray with Chess to control Aphid.

We use Subdue in the end of May and end of July

We also use T34 every week and while we are at it “WOW “Azos and liquid Micos.

We are huge fans off Ron Wallace’s micos and Azos and throw them at the pumpkins at every opportunity. We also throw compost tea at them in ridiculous amounts.

7: What factors do you think contributed the most to your phenomenal success in 2018? Can you walk us through some of your growing techniques / cultural practices and plant lay out?

We’ve done well for the last three years and one of the biggest changes we’ve made is the way we bury our vines. “Roots hate light and need water “. We developed our Paton pot system because we needed a better success rate initiating the top roots. It’s made a huge difference and the best way to see what to do is to YouTube [Giant pumpkin wars](#) “vine burying “.

We asked ourselves a question about our soil preparation. We had a look and our roots only went down twelve inches or so. What would happen if we tilled the top twelve inches took it away tilled the bottom twelve inches then put the top twelve inches back? Add a load of coir and perlite and you get the most amazing soil. It’s a huge amount of work but we’re obsessed pumpkin growers and we get to use a digger.

8: Stuart and Ian you guys have been doing this a long time now and your weights keep going up every year. What are some of the biggest mistake you’ve made in this hobby and how have they changed your current practices?

We’ve made plenty of mistakes usually small but each time it happens a percentage of the pumpkins weight is lost. I like to compare it to a conveyor belt where you can take a step back but not forward. We weren’t always growing each pumpkin perfectly and sometimes made mistakes like letting bugs get out of hand, letting the plants dry out and not vine burying on time. When we started growing less plants a lot of these problems stopped.

9: What advice do you have for growers looking to increase their personal bests in the patch?

Because of our climate we were forced to grow inside to have any chance of competing on the world scene. This meant growing fewer plants. Concentrating all our efforts on fewer plants turned out to be a game changer. We would say if you are growing lots of plants consider growing less but better. Look harder at your soil, can you make it deeper? Is it well enough drained and is there enough air in it.

10: What is your favorite seed stock and what seeds out there do you think have the most potential?

There are three seeds the 1911 Urena 1875 Mendi and the 2003 Haist that have hardly been planted but still produced outstanding pumpkins we will plant some off these this year. The McMullen obviously has something special about it so any seeds with its genetics in them have to be interesting.

Ian and I have been helped by many amazing growers who generously share their knowledge. We have no secrets and if we can help please just ask or have beer with us at the big show.

From Ian and Stewie have a fantastic year in the patch!

