

**Marv Hicks**

“One year I put some ‘feed store’ Dill’s Atlantic Giant seeds in and grew my first giant weighing 118 pounds. A co-worker, Dale Hesel, was coached me a little in 1996. His brother, Galen, and Dr. Marvin Meisner had just started a small pumpkin weigh off in Altoona, PA which I attended that fall. That was when I really got the fever. I was amazed at Tony Ciliberto’s 887. Before leaving, I approached him about getting a few of his seeds, and of course, I had them a short time later.

“In 1997, I planted Tony’s 887 and made my first real attempt at growing a giant pumpkin — ending the season with a beautiful, shiny, yellow AG. I made my first trip to the Altoona weigh off — a 20-minute drive for me. The pumpkin weighed 397 pounds and placed 9th.

“In 1998, I grew a 977 Andersen that had been started by Doc Meisner. Almost perfect weather and rainfall, combined with a patch that was new and not contaminated with pumpkin diseases, gave me my personal best 745.

“1999 was a mediocre year for me, but with an interesting twist. Local growers, led by Marv



Meisner, formed the PA Giant Pumpkin Growers Association, and at season’s end, I was contacted by Beth Rado of VA who was organizing a pumpkin carving event in Washington D.C. at the Vice President’s residence — occupied at that time by Al and Tipper Gore. She wanted my help in procuring a few big pumpkins. Beth was authorized to invite a small number of growers to attend the annual Gore Halloween party. Who would have thought that growing giant pumpkins would give an average guy like me the opportunity to take my family on an adventure such as this?



“In 2000, my youngest son Julian became interested in growing giant pumpkins. I had a 932 McIntyre planted as a backup and was letting him do hand pollinations on it. He got one to take and his season was off, and my plan to pull the plant immediately changed. I was more worried about his pumpkin than any I’ve ever grown. He did 99% of the work on that plant, which was limited to about 220 sq.ft., and he took a 501 pounder to the Altoona weigh off.

“In 2001, I planted a 946 Geerts and 801.5 Stelts in the patch. A blossom end split on the 946 ended it for that one. I kept two pumpkins on the 801 and ended the season with a 673 and 594. I’ve had good years, bad years, and some in-between. I always have pre-season optimism and am full of great expectations, but aware of the reality that this is a fairly high-risk hobby, especially when you are limited to two or three plants. For example, in 2002 I lost two of the most sought after seeds in the world — the 723 Bobier and 846 Calai — both succumbed to fusarium. Julian planted a 968 Sproule that also went down — the patch was empty by mid August.



**The Patch**

“My patch is just over 1200 sq. ft. and I was growing two pumpkins in that space but the last two years have added a third plant that is kept at about 250 sq. ft. I like to get manure on in the fall and try to add organics but don’t always get as much as I’d like. I use some water-soluble fertilizer but try not to overdo it. I’m starting to believe that many of us are getting our patches so out of balance with chemicals, that we are creating a lot of our own problems. I’m also a believer in using michorizal fungi. I’ve seen good results in my patch with it in the past. Not using it last year and losing everything has me committed to not planting without it. It may not be a cure-all but I do believe it increases the plants chance to fight off disease.



**The 700 Pound List**

“Tony Ciliberto called me a few years ago and asked if I would be interested in taking over his 700 pound list. I had seen his list from years past and had also been involved with collecting data for Mike Nepereny’s A.G.G.C. site, so I knew pretty much what I was getting into.

“I send data forms to weigh off sites and ask the coordinators to pass them out to growers of 700 pounders. In return, I send a completed copy of the list to each site coordinator and any grower who returns a form. Most of the data on my list comes directly from the growers but I also use Mike Neperene’s *CucurByte* program and the AGGC website to fill in blanks. Mike, Rock Rivard, and I trade a lot of information back and forth in the months after the weigh offs. I fill in some blanks for them and they fill in some for me. It works out well and benefits everyone in the growing community.

“I hear from a lot of the top growers and many tell me they look forward to the finished list as much as anything they receive. When one gets a call or email from the likes of Paul Handy or Jack LaRue, it certainly is rewarding to know that the work is appreciated.”

Marv Hick’s 700 pound list is one of the most valuable sources of data on giant pumpkins, and an indispensable tool in evaluating your own seed choices from year to year.