

The Top 10 Pests associated with Growing Atlantic Giant Pumpkins
(as determined by the members of BigPumpkins.com and the Mallorn mailing list)

By Joe Ailts, 2003

In an effort to gather information regarding the hardships of growing giant pumpkins, I asked a population of growers to list all the pests they encounter in their patches, ranking from most annoying/destructive/threatening to the least. The list was very diverse, as there were 26 different categories to tally when the results were calculated. I had predicted that the squash vine borer would be the winner, and the voters backed me up. A total of 26 growers contributed to the survey. Even though more data is always better, I feel there were enough contributors to develop a list that is fairly representative of the growing community as whole. The scoring system was simple- each pest on a submission was ranked 1-10. The top pest on each list was granted 10 points, the second 9 points, and so on. The total points for each category were calculated, and the top 10 was formed, based on this total point value. I have also included a “% points captured” column. I totaled the number of points for all 26 categories (775 points) and divided each top 10 pest by this total number to give a percentage. This represents what percentage of the total points each pest captured.

<u>Pest</u>	<u>Points</u>	<u>% points captured</u>
1. SVB	99	12.8
2. Cucumber Beetles	80	10.3
3. Temperature Extremes	77	9.9
4. Other Animals (deer, moose gophers, squirrels, skunks, etc.)	61	7.9
5. Powdery Mildew	55	7.1
6. Woodchucks	55	7.1
7. Rain extremes (hail, no rain)	52	6.7
8. Other people in the patch	37	4.8
9. Dogs	36	4.6
10. Squash bugs	32	4.1

		75.3%

Even though SVB topped the list, it only captured 12.8% of the total points. This shows that there are indeed a large number of problems that we as growers have to put up with on a daily basis, and that there is no single pest that really blows the others out of the water. The top 10 represents 75.3% of the total points tallied, meaning about one-quarter of the points are found in the 16 other categories. It may have been more beneficial to do a top 20, since there were that many categories to choose from. Growing the big one is a never-ending battle. You already know that, because as soon as one pest is under control, the next one rears its ugly head.

As a side note, I have to assign an “Honorable Mention” to a category that I feel deserves to be listed. Coming in at just under the bar, the “me, myself, and I” category scored 31 points. That’s right; people listed themselves as pests in their own gardens! If the scoring system had been based on number of votes rather than a point system, this category would have been ranked

#5! However, it was towards the bottom of most people's lists, therefore did not receive a ranking in the top 10. Message to growers: Be careful out there!

Quick description of pests- Our #1 contender begins as an egg, laid by a female borer moth, on the under side of a leaf or a vine. The egg hatches and the larvae makes it's way down to the vine. It then proceeds to drill a hole into the vine, leaving a sawdust trail in its tracks. The larvae chew their way through the vine, cutting off water and nutrient supply to your fruit. A very damaging pest that is often difficult to control. #2 Cucumber beetles are characterized by their yellow and black stripes. They appear by the hundreds in the middle of May, munching and mating on precious new growth. Also known to be a vector for a pumpkin disease called bacterial wilt. #3 Temperature extremes are tough to deal with. Frosts in May, June, and September (maybe even July and August this year!) are tough to deal with as they usually result in plant death. Extreme heat in July makes fruit setting tough and plants wilt. #4 Animals such as deer, gophers, and squirrels can be big pests. Why is it that they need to take just one bite out of your contest fruit? Why not munch on that cull you tossed into the compost heap? Seems like there is no trap smart enough to catch these animals. Mother nature always wins in the end. #5 Powdery Mildew is a fungus that shows up in August. It thrives in humid, cool conditions. If infected, leaves will turn a dull-white color. The fungus blocks the ability to photosynthesize, thus choking the plant. #6 Woodchucks could have been lumped in with the other animals, but received enough votes to warrant a class of their own. These guys are smart, real smart. They are quite skittish, and usually do their damage at night. For some reason, an AG plant is the equivalent of a woodchuck buffet. They nibble vine tips, your biggest fruit, scratch the soil, and create problems all around. #7 Not enough rain will usually slow fruit growth, and on the other extreme, 1 inch hail will bring it to a screeching halt. Hail can deal a serious amount of damage in a very short time. However, even the Swiss cheese shredded plants can recover and end up producing pumpkins. #8 Other people in the patch can create some unique problems. It's the one pest on the list that you may feel guilty for removing. People just do not understand how fragile a grower's patch is, not much different than a China cabinet. They unknowingly stomp on vines, break leaf stalks, cull prize fruit and then proceed to call YOU crazy? The nerve! #9 They call him man's best friend, that is until he enters the patch. Dogs innocently run around the patches, doing much the same damage that people do. Whether they are chasing butterflies, the cat, or the owner, they always manage to create some sort of havoc. Rounding out the list at #10 are squash bugs. These bugs are brown in color and pretty good sized. They hang out around the stump of the plant, often times you will find their eggs in small groups on leaves. Young squash bugs are a light gray color and hang out in groups near old and dying leaves.

If there is a good thing about these about these pests, it's that the grower can control all of them to some degree. Bugs can be sprayed, animals can be trapped, plants can be watered, and kids can be scolded. Of course, its hard to turn down mother nature's thermostat when its 104 in mid-August, but growers can cope with these problems by putting their heads together, letting creativity flow, and sharing great ideas on pest control. Keep the ideas flowing, and thank you to those who contributed to my over-analysis of the top 10 pests.