

Tyfu Cymru: Technical Advice Sheet

Pumpkin Power Hour – November

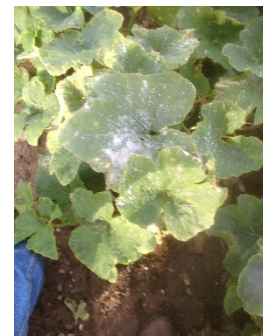
Review of the 2020 Season

The start of the 2020 season was difficult. Late frosts until the first week in May and dry soils delayed planting, but heavy rains then delayed planting further. On the small scale planting under plastic can be used to improve access and weed control during the early part of the season, but may be impractical on the large scale without suitable machinery. As well as keeping moisture in the soil without allowing it to be waterlogged, this will warm the soil and improve early season growth rates. Good conditions across the summer in July and August gave strong growth, but many crops stayed vegetative and produced female flowers later than usual. This led to later ripening than normal, although the majority of fruit achieved full colour in time for autumn sales.



Diseases

Powdery mildew was largely under control this year, with symptoms only appearing towards the season end when it can be helpful in maturing the fruit. Conditions approaching harvest were much better than 2019 with the ground remaining dry which helped to reduce rots in the field. However, the late maturing fruit with thinned skins increased rot and damage risk. Recent trial results have indicated that a calcium foliar spray can help to reduce rot incidence and severity



Weeds

Weed control was difficult due to conditions during establishment, with Fat Hen being especially dense this year. Many growers were able to achieve a stale seed bed in advance of planting, complete with a spray a week before planting – some growers were able to continue spraying until the third week of May. Recent trials have suggested that increased weed cover can have a slight impact on the number of fruit set per planted area, but does not necessarily impact fruit size at harvest once it has set. Heavy weed can also prevent ripening. Herbicides for the 2021 season could include Roundup for a stale seed bed, followed by Gamit, Kerb and/or Flexidor for residual use, up to 24 hours before emergence. Kerb, Flexidor and Gamit are also safe to use over the emerged crop or transplants, but are not effective at controlling emerged weeds. Wing-P can be used as a directed residual although there have been some reports of crop damage this year. Finalsan and Shark can be used as carefully directed contact herbicides. Application rates can be adjusted to suit crop and soil conditions. See the June pumpkin factsheet for rates and EAMU information, or talk to a BASIS qualified consultant which can be organised through Tyfu Cymru.

Marketing

Despite the challenges of COVID there was strong uptake from customers this year as the popularity of Halloween pumpkins continues to grow. Social media was an essential tool in communicating with customers. Many growers had to implement a book-in-advance system to manage customer flow through their site. This could be based on an allotted time period, or on arrival time without restricting time on site. Charging in advance helped to ensure booked slots were not wasted, but the charge could be linked with a redeemable sum against a pumpkin purchase. Given groups are likely to be based around families it may be easiest to allow booking and charging to be based on a car space rather than on a per-head basis. Depending on the service

used you may need to charge a booking fee, but you can adjust your prices to accommodate this. While covid has created the need for these approaches to marketing many growers are finding they have eased customer management and may be of benefit into future years. When pricing fruit you need to think about ways of ensuring consistency in prices – some growers may charge by weight or by size, and displays of pre-picked pumpkins can give customers an idea of price before picking fruit. Smaller fruit such as munchkins have been particularly popular this year selling for £1 - £1.50 a fruit compared with £2-4 for medium fruit (3-5kg), £5-8 for large (5-8kg) and £10 for monsters over £10kg.

Planning for 2021

It's never too early to start planning for the next season, particularly for ordering seed. A broad range of cultivars are available and a summary is given below. When planning cultivars plan what you need to match against customer demands, but also consider your land: for example Racer may perform better on exposed coastal sites compared with Harvest Moon. For seed numbers consider 10,000 to 12,500 plants per ha, although the lower end of the scale may be too few for direct drill sites. Modules will take around 3-4 weeks under protection to reach maturity, but both direct drilled and module plants will need to be planted around the 20th May if the weather is warm enough.



You can always consider alternative crops to complement pumpkins to either extend the season or broaden your offer to your customers. Sunflowers, a maize maze or PYO corn can be very attractive although you would need to consider careful scheduling and variety choice to match the sweetcorn with likely pumpkin marketing periods. Other activities such as digging for potatoes may not offer significant returns but can enhance the experience for customers and increase time spent on site, driving up sales in other areas like a farm café.

Pumpkin Cultivars for 2021

Size Guide	Variety	Type	Supplier	Weight Estimate
Monster	Kratos	Halloween (H)	Clause UK	>10kg
	Captain Jack	H	Sakata	>10 kg
	Gold Medal	H	Tozer	>8 kg
	Champion	H	Tozer	>8 kg
	Large Marge	H	Sakata	12kg
	Mr Wrinkles	H	Sakata	12 kg
	Early King	H	Moles	12kg
	Polar Bear	White	Tozer	>8kg
	Diablo	H	Sakata	8kg
	Earlipack	H	Sakata	8kg
	Wicked	H	Tozer	8kg
Large	Magic Lantern	H	Clause	7kg
	Racer	H	Tozer	5-7kg
	Gladiator	H	Clause	5-6 kg
	Mrs Wrinkles	H	Sakata	7kg
	Harvest Moon	H	CN	4-5kg
Medium	Magician	H	Clause	3-4kg
	Gomez	H	Clause	3-4 kg
	Cargo	H	Tozer	3-4kg
	White Flat Boer	White	Sakata	4kg
	Bellatrix	H	Enza	4kg
	Mars	H	Tozer	2-4 kg
Small & Mini	Spitfire	Mini (M)	Clause	1kg
	Full Splendour	M	Sakata	2kg
	Jack Sprat	M	Sakata	1-2kg
Warts	Toad	Warty (W)	Sakata	1kg
	Goosebumps	W	Tozer	2kg
	Warty Gnome	W	Clause	2kg
	Warty Goblin	W	Clause	2 kg
	Knuckle head	W	Moles	5-7kg

Disclaimer

Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of information and recommendations given in these notes. All applications of crop protection chemicals should be made in accordance with label recommendations, which should be consulted before spraying. Some of the pesticides mentioned in these notes may not be supported by label recommendations for their use on pumpkin crops but are permissible via Extension of Authorisation for Minor Use (EAMU) in the UK under 'The Revised Long Term Arrangements For Extension Of Use (2002)'. In these cases, the use of the pesticide is at the risk of the user and Tyfu Cymru does not accept liability for any loss or damage caused by such use. The references to on-label approvals and EAMUs for use of pesticides in pumpkin crops and are correct at the time of writing. These are subject to change and approval may be withdrawn at any point. It is the grower's responsibility to check approvals before use of pesticides. If in doubt a grower should seek advice from a BASIS qualified advisor - this is available free of charge for eligible growers through the Tyfu Cymru program, please contact us to arrange an appointment – email/telephone advice is also available.