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3-17-2021

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Recommended Citation

Smigell, Chris; Strang, John; Snyder, John; Pfeufer, Emily; Perry, Bob; and DeWitt, Emily, "Pie/Decorative Pumpkin Cultivar Evaluation" (2021). *Midwest Vegetable Trial Reports*. Paper 35.
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Pie/Decorative Pumpkin Cultivar Evaluation

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The University of Kentucky Vegetable Production Guide for Commercial Growers (ID-36) lists only one recommended pie pumpkin cultivar. Thus, fourteen cultivars were evaluated in a replicated trial to determine their performance under Central Kentucky growing conditions. Pie pumpkins are often purchased as seasonal decorations, so these were also evaluated for visual attributes. A culinary evaluation of roasted pumpkin slices was also conducted.

Materials and Methods

Cultivars were seeded on 26 May 2020 into 72-cell plastic plug trays filled with ProMix BX multipurpose media (Premier Horticulture, Inc.) at the University of Kentucky Horticulture Research Farm in Lexington. Plants were set into black plastic-mulched, raised beds using a waterwheel setter on 17 June. Plots were 15 feet long, containing seven plants of one cultivar set 30 inches apart within the row. Rows were eight feet apart. Each plot was replicated four times in a randomized, complete-block design.

Fifty pounds per acre of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium were applied as 19-19-19 prior to planting, and tilled in. Approximately one cup per plant of starter solution (3 lb Miller Sol-U-Gro 12-48-8 in 50 gallons of water) was applied at transplanting. The plot was drip-irrigated and fertigated weekly with 3 lb of nitrogen per acre (using calcium nitrate) from 16 July through 27 August for a total of six fertigations and 18 lb of nitrogen per acre. Teff grass (*Eragrostis tef*) was seeded at a rate of 36 lbs/A and lightly tilled in to suppress weed growth.

Eleven weekly fungicide sprays were applied, 24 June through 1 September. Fungicides included chlorothalonil (Initiate 270) (4 sprays), thiophanate methyl (Topsin M) (2 sprays), mancozeb (Gavel) (2), penthiopyrad (Fontelis) (2), pyraclostrobin (Cabrio) (3), cyazofamid (Ranman) (2), and propamocarb HCl (Previcur Flex) (2). Scanner surfactant was mixed with fungicides on 12 and 19 August. Insecticides were applied weekly from 24 June through 22 July, and on 5 and 19 August. These included one application of esfenvalerate (Asana), and three applications each of acetamiprid (Assail) and zeta-cypermethrin (Mustang Maxx). Clethodim (Select) herbicide was used on 5 August to kill the teff grass, which had grown about 15 inches tall, hiding the plant runners and pumpkins growing in the row middles. All pesticide application rates were based on recommendations in the 2020-21 University of Kentucky Vegetable Production Guide for Commercial Growers (ID-36).

All pumpkins were harvested, counted and weighed between 14 and 19 September, regardless of the published number of days to harvest. All pumpkins of a cultivar were then gathered and rated in the field for shape uniformity and attractiveness. A week later, they were stored in an unheated building until remaining evaluations began on 8 October. One representative pumpkin

of each cultivar from each of the four replications was evaluated for size (height and width), exterior color, flesh thickness, fruit shape, and stem color, diameter and attractiveness by two horticulture department personnel. Juice was expressed from skinless pumpkin slices using an Omega multi-purpose food processor (Omega Inc, Harrisburg, PA). Sugar content of the juice was measured as °Brix using a handheld refractometer (American Optical model 10431, Deerfield, IL). To gauge pumpkin size variability among all pumpkins of one cultivar, the coefficient of variability (CV) for pumpkin weight was calculated by dividing the sample standard deviation of the individual pumpkin weights by average pumpkin weight and expressing the result as a percentage.

On 25 August foliage of the cultivars was evaluated for severities of the fungal diseases downy mildew (*Pseudoperonospora cubensis*) and powdery mildew (*Sphaerotheca fuliginea*). Seven leaves per plot were evaluated for both diseases by estimating the percentages of the tops and bottoms of leaves covered by each disease separately.

All cultivars were evaluated for eating qualities. The heirloom squash ‘North Georgia Candy Roaster’ was also included, as it is known for making high-quality pumpkin pies. The evaluation was conducted in the kitchen of the University of Kentucky Dietetics and Human Nutrition Program. The evaluators included the authors and three students. All pumpkins/squash were cut top-to-bottom, cleaned of seeds, and cut into one-inch thick half-circles. All samples were coated with a light film of canola oil, sprinkled with kosher salt and placed on parchment paper covered aluminum trays. Samples were baked in a convection oven at 400° F for about 20 minutes until done. As soon as samples cooled, they were evaluated for color (light yellow to orange), intensity of aroma, sweetness and flavor, firmness while chewing, texture (soft/creamy to stringy/grainy) and overall appeal.

Results and Discussion

The weather was cool, with only one day reaching 90° F between the planting date and harvest. During this period 14.7 inches of rain fell. July’s 5.4 inches were 0.6 inches above the local monthly average, and August’s 3.5 inches were 0.2 inches below average for August. Although the cultivars’ advertised days to harvest ranged from 85 to 105, all cultivars were harvested at about 90 days after planting. Very few immature pumpkins remained in the field by then, and several cultivars had dried stems and dead vines, indicating they were overripe. Teff grass, when planted early, can effectively restrict weed growth in row middles. However, tilling in the teff seed delayed its emergence, and weed growth was not sufficiently inhibited. The Select herbicide was slow to kill the Teff at the late stage of growth at which the herbicide was applied. Although it was dead and dry by harvest, it still hampered tracing vines and pumpkins back to their source plants for positive identification. Commercial producers are advised to broadcast teff seed, without tilling, and prior to a rain for better germination, and better weed control. It should be killed with a graminicide at about eight inches height. Another option is to apply a preemergent herbicide at planting time for weed control.

Field Trial Results. Figure 1 displays all tested cultivars. Cultivars are ranked in Tables 1 and 2 by the total marketable yields. While pounds-per-acre and fruit counts are important, uniformity of size, color and shape and stem attractiveness are also important for producers selling decorative pumpkins. ‘Speckled Hound’ and ‘Lumina’ are not pumpkins, but rather

squashes. Both were deeply ribbed and quite variable in size, compared to the pumpkins. Most pumpkin cultivars had shallow ribbing, smooth skin with no warts, and, except for ‘Darling’, were round to slightly taller than wide. Based on attributes in these tables, the top-performing cultivars were ‘**Bisbee Gold**’, ‘**Baby Wrinkles**’, ‘**Darling**’, ‘**Fall Splendor Plus**’, ‘**Jack Sprat**’, ‘**Little Giant**’ and ‘**Cinnamon Girl**’. ‘Bisbee Gold’ (Figure 2) stood out as one of the most attractive and highest-yielding pumpkins, with a very consistent shape, dark orange color with thick, green to dark green stems. It also had the second-least variability in pumpkin weight (CV) and was one of the largest pumpkins in the trial. ‘Baby Wrinkles’ was the heaviest pumpkin; its weight yield was high, but the number of pumpkins per acre was low. It was also dark orange, with dark green stems of varying thickness, and had a high sugar content. ‘Darling’ (Figure 3) was the only tall, oblong pumpkin. It was also dark orange, with dark green, prominent, buttressed stems, that rated highest for stem attractiveness among all cultivars. ‘Darling’ pumpkins were uniform in shape and weight. Its sugar content was only 5.3 °Brix, and it had a high percentage of culls due to four off-type fruit. ‘Fall Splendor Plus’ (Figure 4) produced a high number of pumpkins per acre having similar weights. Pumpkins were attractive, a little wider at the bottom than the top, medium orange with long, green stems. It had a high sugar content. ‘Jack Sprat’ (Figure 5) produced the most pumpkins per acre of all cultivars tested, and they had low weight variability. It was very attractive, medium orange with dark green stems, and had a high sugar content. ‘Little Giant’ (Figure 6) and ‘Cinnamon Girl’ were among the smallest pumpkins, dark orange with very shallow ribbing and very attractive stems. Both had high sugar contents, with ‘Little Giant’ having the highest mean sugar content of any cultivar in the trial. ‘Little Giant’ also yielded the third-highest number of pumpkins per acre in the trial. ‘Naked Bear’ (Figure 7) is unusual, in that its seeds do not have seed coats, hence the name.

Disease Ratings. The disease ratings were conducted on 25 August. All cultivars had both powdery and downy mildew this late in the season. Powdery mildew (Table 3) was severe, with the percent of leaf under sides covered by this fungus ranging from 44% to 80% for different cultivars, and from 4% to 20% on upper leaf surfaces. The two squash, ‘**Speckled Hound**’ and ‘**Lumina**’, had some of the lowest powdery mildew severity ratings on upper and lower leaf surfaces, as did ‘**Bisbee Gold**’, ‘**Baby Wrinkles**’ and ‘**Baby Pam**’. ‘**Jack Sprat**’ had a low powdery mildew severity rating for its leaf under sides. Cultivars with advertised powdery mildew resistance did not, as a group, tend to have lower severity ratings. Downy mildew (Table 4) was less severe, with the percent lower leaf area covered with downy mildew ranging from 5% to 23% for different cultivars. Upper leaf surfaces affected by downy mildew ranged from 1% to 9%. Most cultivars did not differ significantly in downy mildew severity on the bottoms of leaves. ‘**Baby Pam**’, ‘**Jack Sprat**’, ‘**Little Giant**’ and ‘**Lumina**’ had some of the lower downy mildew severity ratings on both leaf sides.

Culinary Evaluation Results. Based on the evaluation of roasted pumpkin samples (Table 5), ‘**Speckled Hound**’, ‘**Lumina**’, ‘**Cinnamon Girl**’, ‘**Little Giant**’ and ‘**Jack Sprat**’ rated the highest. ‘Speckled Hound’, ‘Lumina’ and ‘North Georgia Candy Roaster’ are not pumpkins, but squash types. They have a smooth texture, with no stringiness or granular structure found in nearly all the pumpkins in this evaluation. All of these top performers rated highly for chewing softness, smooth texture, aroma and sweetness, but not necessarily for strong flavor. There was not much variability among the pumpkins’ flavor and aroma ratings, but the three squash flavor

and aroma ratings were significantly higher than most of the pumpkins' flavor and aroma ratings.

Summary. Considering yield, fruit attractiveness and roasted pumpkin evaluations, **'Bisbee Gold'**, **'Baby Wrinkles'**, **'Fall Splendor Plus'** and **'Jack Sprat'** were the best pumpkins in this trial. **'Speckled Hound'** was the better-performing squash. These will be included in the next edition of the Vegetable Production Guide for Commercial Growers (ID-36).

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Dave Lowry, Joseph Tucker, Grant Clouser, Steve Diver, and Jackson "Cade" Laumas for their hard work and assistance. We also thank College of Agriculture students Dylan Crawford, Paulina Antimisiaris and Alyssa Kuman for their evaluations, and Steve Patton, Ag Communications, for the photographs. The authors also thank Clifton Seeds, Johnny's Seeds, Rupp Seeds and Seedway for their seed donations. Funding for this trial was provided by a grant from the Kentucky Horticulture Council through the Agricultural Development Board.

Literature Cited

University of Kentucky Vegetable Production Guide for Commercial Growers, 2020-21 (ID-36)
[ID-36: Vegetable Production Guide for Commercial Growers, 2020-21 \(uky.edu\)](#).

Table 1. Pumpkin yields, weight and fruit dimensions.

Cultivar	Seed Source	Days ¹ To Harvest	Total Marketable Yield (lb/A)		Pumpkins (No/A)		Avg Fruit Wt (lb)		Fruit Weight Variability (CV) ²	Cull (% wt) ³	Fruit Height (in) ⁴	Fruit Width (in) ⁴	Flesh Thickness (in) ⁴
Bisbee Gold	RU	90	33500	a ⁵	7160	bcde	4.7	c	22	0.0	6.5	6.9	1.1
Speckled Hound (squash)	SW	95	33400	a	6920	bcde	4.8	bc	33	2.8	4.8	7.7	1.5
Baby Wrinkles	CL	105	28400	b	5210	f	5.4	b	28	2.2	4.8	7.0	1.1
Darling	RU	90	28300	b	6770	cde	4.2	cd	25	8.3	4.8	5.7	1.1
Lumina (squash)	SW	90	27500	bc	2860	g	9.6	a	35	0.0	4.8	8.8	1.4
Fall Splendor Plus	CL	105	25000	bcd	6850	bcde	3.7	def	27	0.0	4.8	6.2	1.1
New England Pie	JO	105	24300	bcd	8320	ab	3.0	fgh	33	0.0	4.8	5.9	0.9
Jack Sprat	SW	100	22900	cde	9800	a	2.3	hi	25	1.6	4.8	5.4	0.8
Mystic Plus	CL	105	22800	cde	5830	ef	3.9	de	20	1.2	4.8	6.8	1.1
Spookie	HO	90	21800	def	6770	cde	3.3	ef	39	0.4	5.8	6.3	1.2
Small Sugar New England	HO	100	20400	def	6770	cde	3.1	fg	32	1.7	4.8	6.1	1.1
Little Giant	SW	105	18900	ef	8010	bc	2.4	ghi	37	4.4	4.8	5.2	0.8
Baby Pam	RU	100	17100	fg	7550	bcd	2.2	i	31	1.8	4.8	5.2	1.0
Cinnamon Girl	JO	85	13800	g	6380	def	2.2	i	25	8.1	4.8	5.6	0.8
Naked Bear	SW	105	13400	g	6300	def	2.2	i	30	0.8	4.8	5.4	0.7

¹Days to harvest from seed catalogues.

²CV=coefficient of variability; a smaller CV means that there is less of a spread of harvested pumpkin weights, compared to a cultivar with a higher CV.

³Wt of culled pumpkins divided by sum of marketable + immature + culled pumpkins X 100.

⁴Values are the average of 4 pumpkins, one sampled from each replicate.

⁵Means in column followed by the same letter are not significantly different (Duncan Multiple Range Test P=0.05).

Table 2. Cultivar mean¹ evaluation ratings and comments.

Cultivar	External Appearance (1-5)²	Shape Uniformity (1-5)²	Fruit Shape (1-4)³	Smoothness (1-5)⁴	Ribbing (1-5)⁵	Stem Diameter (in)	Stem Appearance (1-5)²	Sugar Content (°brix)⁶	Comments and Disease Resistance⁷
Bisbee Gold	4.5	4.0	3.0	2.3	2.8	1.4	3.6	8.6	Most fruit near plant base; thick, straight, dark green stems; uniform size and dark orange color; attractive; good pie size
Speckled Hound (squash)	3.5	3.0	1.0	4.0	4.3	0.8	2.5	7.2	A squash, most fruit near plant base; short, tan stems; variable sizes, most good for one pie; varies from orange with few green spots to green with few orange spots; corky warts; IR: zucchini yellow mosaic virus
Baby Wrinkles	4.1	4.0	2-4	2.1	2.7	1.1	3.9	7.8	Long vines, scattered fruit; most fruit dark orange; straight, attractive stems vary in thickness; IR: PM
Darling	4.5	4.4	3.0	3.5	2.1	0.9	4.8	5.3	Most fruit near plant base; nice, short, buttressed stems; most are tall & narrow; some darker skin freckles; one makes a pie; IR: PM
Lumina (squash)	2.0	2.0	2.0	4.3	4.7	0.7	2.0	8.0	A squash; very long vines, scattered fruit; stubby weak stems; variable fruit size; white to bluish gray with white streaks; turns gray if left in the field too long after maturity; corky warts
Fall Splendor Plus	4.1	3.6	2.0	2.5	2.9	1.0	4.5	8.1	Most fruit near plant base; long, dark green stems; fruit size varies; most fruit wider at bottom; IR: PM
New England Pie	3.5	4.0	2.3	3.0	2.3	0.8	3.0	7.5	Long, thin vines, scattered fruit; variable stem thicknesses; most fruit lt orange
Jack Sprat	4.6	4.1	2.5	3.0	2.1	1.0	4.5	8.3	Moderately long vines; medium length stems; uniform color, attractive; IR: PM

Table 2. Cultivar mean¹ evaluation ratings and comments (cont.)

Cultivar	External Appearance (1-5)²	Shape Uniformity (1-5)²	Fruit Shape (1-4)³	Smoothness (1-5)⁴	Ribbing (1-5)⁵	Stem Diameter (in)	Stem Appearance (1-5)²	Sugar Content (°brix)⁶	Comments and Disease Resistance⁷
Mystic Plus	4.1	4.3	2.0	2.2	2.6	1.2	3.4	7.3	Moderately long vines; long, thick, straight stems; mostly uniform color among fruit; good size for one pie; IR: PM
Spookie	3.9	3.0	2.8	2.9	2.8	0.8	3.0	5.9	Long vines, scattered fruit; good, long, thin stem; variable fruit shape, size & color
Small Sugar New England	3.3	3.3	2.0	3.1	2.5	1.0	2.8	5.6	An old standard; most fruit near plant base; long, thin stems; variable fruit sizes
Little Giant	4.6	4.1	3.5	3.8	1.9	1.0	4.6	8.9	Most fruit near plant base; strong, dark, buttressed, attractive stems; uniform fruit shape & color; IR:PM
Baby Pam	3.7	4.4	2.5	4.1	2.0	0.8	2.6	6.7	Long vines, scattered fruit; long, thin stems varying in thickness
Cinnamon Girl	4.3	4.2	2.0	3.0	1.9	1.1	4.3	8.0	Most fruit near plant base; long, dark green stems fading to tan; straight & curved stems; several rot culls; IR: PM
Naked Bear	2.8	4.3	2.0	4.1	2.5	1.2	2.3	7.9	Most fruit near plant base; fruit are close to yellow; decent-sized seeds with no shells; IR: PM

¹Values are the average of 4 pumpkins, one sampled from each replicate.

²1=poor; 5=excellent.

³1=flattened, 2=oval, 3=blocky, 4=round, 5=highly variable.

⁴1=smooth, 5=rough and warty.

⁵1=no ribbing, 5=deep ribbing.

⁶ Refractometer measurement of soluble solids (primarily sugars) in pumpkin juice sample.

⁷ Disease resistances from seed catalogs: IR=intermediate resistance; PM=powdery mildew.

Table 3. Powdery mildew severity¹ ratings, 25 August.

Cultivar ^{2,3}	Per cent coverage leaf under sides		Per cent coverage leaf top sides	
Speckled Hound	45	a ⁴	8	abc
Baby Pam	49	ab	7	ab
Lumina	49	ab	10	abc
Jack Sprat (pm)	52	abc	13	abc
Bisbee Gold	55	abc	7	ab
Baby Wrinkles (pm)	64	bcd	4	a
Mystic Plus (pm)	65	cd	17	bc
New England Pie	73	d	12	abc
Spookie	74	d	10	abc
Darling (pm)	74	d	15	abc
Little Giant (pm)	75	d	17	bc
Fall Splendor Plus (pm)	75	d	20	c
Naked Bear (pm)	77	d	20	c
Cinnamon Girl (pm)	80	d	15	abc
Small Sugar New England	80	d	13	abc

¹ Percent of top or under side leaf surface covered with powdery mildew; average coverage of 7 sampled leaves from each of 3 replicates.

² Ranked in increasing average severity of mildew on leaf bottom sides.

³ (pm) indicates powdery mildew resistance, advertised in seed catalogs.

⁴ Numbers followed by the same letter are not significantly different according to Duncan's Multiple Range Test (P>0.05).

Table 4. Downy mildew severity¹ ratings, 25 August.

Cultivar ²	Per cent coverage leaf under sides		Per cent coverage leaf top sides	
	Per cent	Letter	Per cent	Letter
Baby Pam	4	a	2	ab
Little Giant	5	a	1	a
Darling	6	a	3	ab
Cinnamon Girl	6	a	2	ab
Jack Sprat	6	a	1	a
Bisbee Gold	7	a	3	ab
Lumina	7	a	1	a
Naked Bear	8	a	4	ab
Baby Wrinkles	9	a	4	ab
Fall Splendor Plus	10	a	3	ab
Mystic Plus	10	a	4	ab
Small Sugar New England	11	a	4	ab
Speckled Hound	20	b	5	b
Spookie	21	b	5	b
New England Pie	23	b	9	c

¹ Percent of top or under side leaf surface covered with downy mildew; average coverage of 7 sampled leaves from each of 3 replicates.

² Ranked in increasing average severity of mildew on top sides of leaves.

³ Numbers followed by the same letter are not significantly different according to Duncan's Multiple Range Test (P>0.05).

Table 5. Roasted pumpkin evaluation data and comments.

Cultivar	Color (1-5) ¹	Aroma (1-5) ²		Sweetness (1-5) ²		Flavor (1-5) ²		Firmness (1-5) ³		Texture (1-5) ⁴		Overall Appeal (1-5) ²		Comments
Speckled Hound (squash)	3.9	3.3	ab ⁵	3.9	a	4.1	a	4.7	a	4.9	a	3.9	a	Fruity flavor, strong flavor, very smooth texture, slightly bitter, dark orange
Lumina (squash)	2.4	3.4	a	3.4	ab	3.7	ab	4.6	a	3.9	bc	3.6	ab	Slight fishy aroma, distinct flavor, smooth texture, slight green color
Cinnamon Girl	2.7	2.3	bcd	2.7	bcd	2.7	bcd	3.6	bcd	3.4	cdef	3.4	abc	Good mouthfeel, light sweet flavor and delicate texture, flesh a little dry
Little Giant	2.2	2.1	cd	3.1	abc	2.9	bcd	3.9	ab	3.5	cde	3.3	abc	Tender and easy to cut up, very sweet, full-flavored and rich, flesh slightly dry and fibrous
Jack Sprat	2.3	2.1	cd	2.4	cdef	3.0	bcd	3.7	bc	3.8	bcd	3.2	abc	Delicious, unique savory flavor
North Georgia Candy Roaster (squash)	1.7	2.6	abc	2.6	bcde	3.1	bcd	4.6	a	4.6	ab	3.1	abcd	Delicious
Bisbee Gold	2.7	2.1	cd	1.9	def	2.6	cd	2.9	cde	2.1	g	2.9	bcde	Good sweet buttery mild flavor
Spookie	3.5	2.6	abc	2.1	def	3.3	abc	3.4	bcd	2.6	efg	2.9	bcde	Distinct savory flavor
Fall Splendor Plus	2.2	2.1	cd	1.9	def	2.6	cd	3.1	bcd	2.4	fg	2.7	bcde	Good, mild flavor, not sweet, looks stringy, but has good mouthfeel
Baby Wrinkles	2.5	2.0	cd	1.9	def	2.1	d	2.1	ef	2.6	efg	2.6	cdef	Mild flavor, neutral flavor, faint aroma
Baby Pam	2.6	1.6	cd	1.9	def	3.0	bcd	1.4	f	3.1	cdefg	2.4	cdef	Strong savory flavor, not stringy
New England Pie	2.9	1.8	cd	1.9	def	2.5	cd	2.7	de	3.1	cdefg	2.4	cdef	Neutral flavor, slightly bitter, smooth texture
Small Sugar New England	3.6	2.4	bcd	1.4	f	2.7	bcd	3.4	bcd	2.8	defg	2.4	cdef	Delicious
Naked Bear	2.3	2.3	bcd	2.2	cdef	3.0	bcd	4.0	ab	3.1	cdefg	2.2	def	Unique flavor, slightly bitter, smooth
Mystic Plus	2.4	1.5	d	1.9	def	3.0	bcd	2.1	ef	2.2	g	2.1	ef	Savory flavor, bitter, bad mouthfeel
Darling	2.9	2.3	bcd	1.6	ef	2.4	cd	1.7	f	2.3	fg	1.6	f	Bland, watery, fibrous

¹1=lightest, 5=darkest.²1=least, 5=most; a high flavor rating indicates flavor intensity, not necessarily good flavor.³1=firmest to chew, 5=softest.⁴1=fibrous or grainy texture, 5=smoothest texture.⁵ Means in column followed by the same letter are not significantly different (Duncan Multiple Range Test P=0.05).



Figure 1. Key: (1) Baby Pam, (2) Small Sugar New England, (3) Cinnamon Girl, (4) New England Pie, (5) Naked Bear, (6) Baby Wrinkles, (7) Fall Splendor Plus, (8) Little Giant, (9) Speckled Hound, (10) Darling, (11) Jack Sprat, (12) Mystic Plus, (13) Lumina, (14) Bisbee Gold, (15) Spookie. (All photos: Steve Patton, UK Ag Communications)



Figure 2. Bisbee Gold



Figure 3. Darling



Figure 4. Fall Splendor Plus



Figure 5. Jack Sprat



Figure 6. Little Giant



Figure 7. Naked Bear