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2023 Evaluation of Pumpkin Cultivars in West Virginia

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Pumpkins (*Cucurbita sp.* L.) are a very popular fall crop in West Virginia. Each year, new, commercial cultivars are released and growers must choose the appropriate cultivars for their respective markets. In 2023, sixteen jack-o-lantern types were evaluated for commercial production.

Materials and Methods

The pumpkin cultivars were direct-seeded on June 20, 2023 at Hazel Run Farm near Bruceton Mill, WV (Figure 1). Prior to seeding, 500 lbs. 19-19-19 fertilizer was broadcast and incorporated with a disk-harrow. Seeds were planted in bare-soil with no mulch. Each plot contained four plants, spaced 4 ft. apart within the row, and 8 ft. between rows (32 ft²/plant) resulting in approximately 1300 plants/acre. Weeds were controlled using mechanical tillage and no herbicides or fungicides applied. The experimental design was a randomized complete block design with 4 replications per cultivar. Marketable pumpkins were harvested on October 5, 2023 and average weight and number recorded.

Results

Large size (>25 lb.) cultivars included ‘Cronus’ and ‘Large Marge’, with ‘Cronus’ producing the highest yield per acre within this size class (Table 1). ‘Cronus’ also had better color and stem characteristics compared with ‘Large Marge.’



Figure 1. Field trial evaluation of commercial pumpkins in 2023.

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Table 1. Pumpkin cultivars evaluated in West Virginia, 2023.

Cultivar	Days to maturity ^z	Seed Vendor ^y	Avg. wt. (lbs.)	Marketable yield ^x	
				t·acre ⁻¹	no.·acre ⁻¹
Aladdin	100	Harris	16.2	3.6	2043
Ares	115	Osborne	20.8	8.6	3405
Bayhorse Gold	100	Harris	18.9	7.2	3405
Big Deal	100	Osborne	11.1	4.6	3405
Bellatrix	105	Osborne	16.5	6.9	4767
Carrie	95	Harris	15.1	8.4	4540
Cronus	110	Harris	37.1	15.3	3746
Gladiator	115	Osborne	15.7	7.7	4086
Griffin	110	Harris	20.2	26.8	9080
Hawk	95	Osborne	24.9	11.6	3405
Hermes	90	Harris	11.9	8.3	5448
Justify	100	Osborne	19.5	10.3	4086
Large Marge	105	Osborne	36.0	6.1	1362
Moonshine	100	Osborne	5.7	5.6	7241
Silver Moon	100	Harris	8.0	6.5	6810
Zeus	110	Harris	10.3	4.4	2724
<i>Mean</i>			<i>11.5</i>	<i>7.0</i>	<i>3395</i>
<i>Standard Error</i>			<i>1.3</i>	<i>1.1</i>	<i>444</i>

^zBased on optimal growing conditions referenced from seed vendors

^yHarris Seeds, Rochester, NY; Osborne Seeds, Mt. Vernon, WA

^xBased on plant populations of ≈ 1300 plants/acre.

The majority of cultivars produced pumpkins in the medium size class (15-25 lbs.). ‘Griffin’ is a tall pumpkin with good color, medium ribbing and good stem quality. This cultivar produced significantly high tonnage per acre as well as fruit count (Table 1). ‘Justify’, ‘Hawk’, ‘Bellatrix’ and ‘Hermes’ produced high yields with respect to pumpkin count and average weight per pumpkin. ‘Bayhorse Gold’ and ‘Gladiator’ did not produce the highest yields, but consistently perform well in West Virginia as a medium-size, jack-o-lantern pumpkin. ‘Moonshine’ produced high yields of small (<10 lb.), uniform, white pumpkins.

Pumpkins are an excellent, direct market crop for many farms in Appalachia. In this trial, we experienced mid-season deer damage, but fencing was later deployed to protect the crop. Input costs per acre for pumpkins are relatively low and market outlets are diverse such as U-Pick, Farm-to-School and roadside stands.

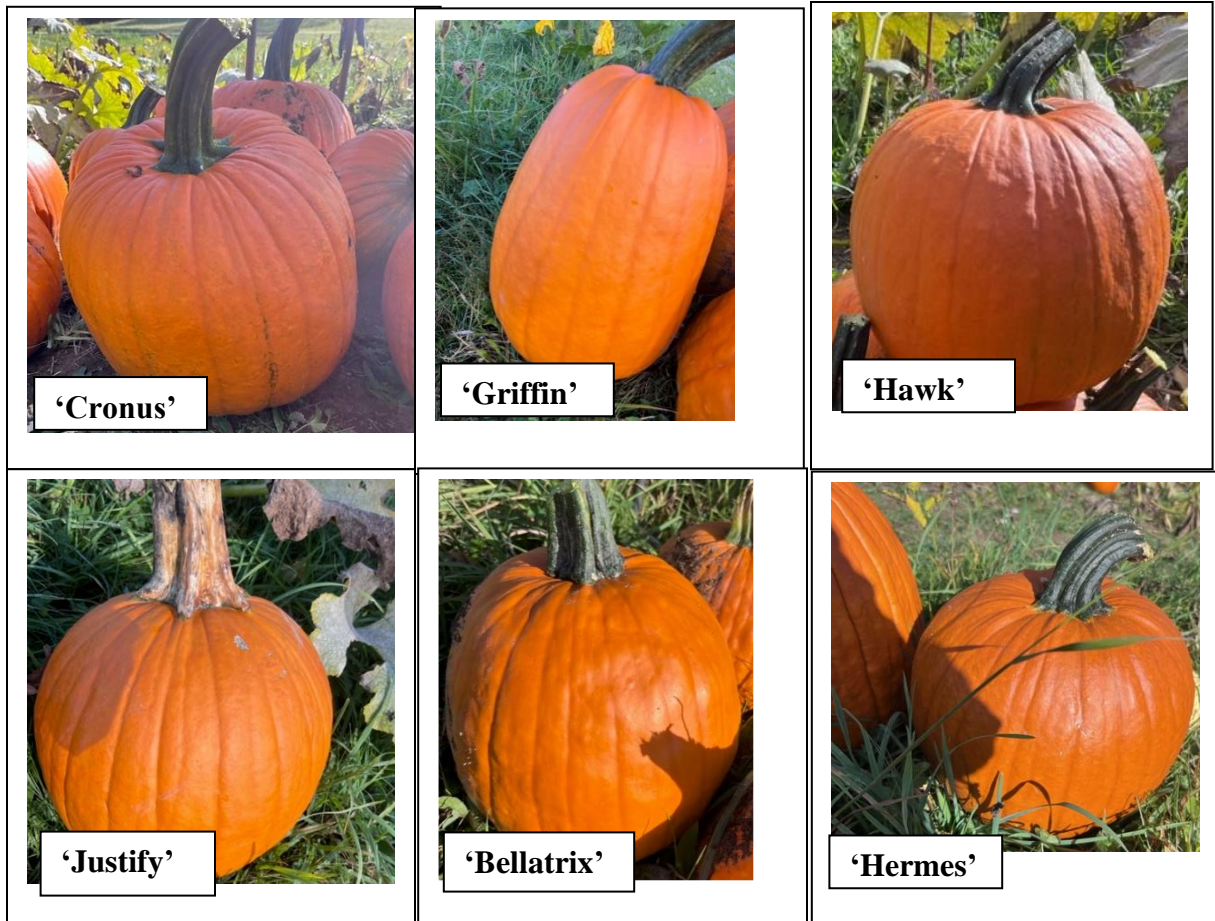


Figure 2. Pumpkin fruit characteristics of top performing cultivars.

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