

High Times Interview Jorge Cervantes

Interview 2011 – <https://hightimes.com/author/jorge-cervantes/>

Jorge Cervantes, the pied piper of pot to millions of clandestine cannabis growers, published Marijuana Horticulture AKA “The Indoor Bible” in the early 80s, sparking a revolution in do-it-yourself underground horticulture.

This November in Amsterdam, HIGH TIMES will honor the ultimate master grower with the Lester Grinspoon Lifetime Achievement Award, celebrating Cervantes’ numerous achievements as a cultivator, teacher, author and activist.

Check out this interview from 2011, in which Jorge discusses how it feels to finally be a legal patient, how to pick out the best buds in a dispensary and how to get started growing your own medicine at home.

Don’t miss seeing Jorge at the Cannabis Cup, where he’ll be teaching a master class in growing cannabis and celebrating the beginning of the end of prohibition. –Elise McDonough

The Constant Gardener

Since 1983, Jorge Cervantes has sold well over 700,000 copies of his acclaimed book *Marijuana Horticulture*, which has now been published in nine countries in seven languages. He’s recognized around the world for his contributions to cannabis cultivation, including frequently traveling great distances to report on the latest techniques used by expert growers.

After a long absence, Jorge recently returned to California, where he now lives for part of the year. HIGH TIMES caught up with Jorge at his new home, where – after giving us a tour of an impressive backyard garden project – he settled down in his office to field our questions.

What made you get into this line of work, anyway?



Jorge: It was exciting, and I just didn't fit in with anything else. So why have one those regular jobs – and hate it – when you can garden instead, growing this wonderful plant that you love to smoke? Also, I thought I was getting in on the ground floor before it got legal.

Turns out you weren't in on the ground floor – more like the basement.

I was in on the underground floor. But I don't regret it.

Typically, people ask you about growing great cannabis, but I thought we should start with some advice on choosing your medicine when you actually do have a choice – at a dispensary, for instance – instead of being stuck with whatever some guy offers you...

Jorge: When selecting cannabis, first you want to smell it; that'll tell you a lot. If it smells musty at all, for example, it wasn't dried properly. I would also look for cannabis that has been handled gently, because most of the THC and other important cannabinoids are in the resin, which is found in fluid-filled sacs on the surface of the buds that look like tiny crystals to the naked eye. Those resin glands are very fragile; it's easy to knock them off, and that starts the bud degrading. Excessive heat and light will also degrade your medicine.

One trick I use is to always look carefully and make sure each bud was well manicured or trimmed – meaning no exposed stems or excess leaf – as that's generally the sign of a careful grower who took good care of the product all the way down the line. Otherwise, at a top-flight dispensary, I would ask the budtender or management for recommendations based on your specific needs. Perhaps you're searching for pain relief and help sleeping, or you need to stimulate your appetite or relieve tension and anxiety.

Once you get your medicine home, transfer the buds carefully to a rigid, airtight container like a glass jar, where they fit comfortably without too much excess space, and then store the container in a cool, dry, dark, secure place.

For medical-marijuana patients living in states where it's legal for them to grow, how would you recommend getting started?

Jorge: First, you need to think things over carefully before making that decision, including carefully researching all of the local and state laws where you live. Then I'd say grow outside, if you can, because it's a lot less expensive, a lot easier, requires less of a time commitment and, with a relatively small number of plants, you can harvest enough to supply yourself for a year. Beginners should also consider starting with cuttings (also known as clones) from a trusted dispensary or collective, since this will reduce vegetative growth time while ensuring all of your plants are female.

If you want to grow indoors, that's a bit more complex. I'd start with one of those little grow closets – the collapsible ones – and just one light. That's a relatively inexpensive way to supply yourself with medicine on a manageable scale.

Either way, you should grow in soil and organically, which means without using chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Organic fertilizers work with the bacteria, the protozoa, the microbes, everything in the living soil, so you have an overall healthier plant – not to mention one that hasn't been exposed to all of those weird chemicals.

Does that make it a healthier choice for the patient as well?

Jorge: Just like organic foods, organic buds are better for your body. Also, organic cannabis has a superior taste, because there are no synthetic chemicals, and the bud expresses all of its terpenes or essential oils. Those terpenes are what give cannabis the smell and taste of lemons or pine, for example – and that all comes out much more when you grow organically.

How has your thinking changed since you started writing about this plant?

It's gotten to be a way bigger thing than I ever imagined. Well, I thought it would be legal long ago, as far as that goes, but at the same time ... gosh! When I started, I didn't even know it was a medicinal plant. I knew that it appeared to give some people more peace in their life, and that always was kind of fascinating – but as far as marijuana being such a powerful medicine, it still flips me out.

Is there a specific moment you remember coming to that realization about the medicinal power of the cannabis plant?

Jorge: Yeah. It was in Vancouver in 1998, at the BC Compassion Club, when I met this guy suffering from MS. He had the shakes so damn bad ... serious tremors. To talk to him was almost impossible; you did not know what he was saying. Then I watched him spend 10 minutes rolling this great big fatty, a huge joint (you know, they call them “fatties” up there). Well, by the time this guy smoked half of it, you could understand what he was saying. By the time he was finished with it, he quit shaking. If that's not proof, I don't know what is I spent the next couple of days there just talking to everybody who came in the front door, and it was one story after another of how marijuana helped people.

Do you have a card or a doctor's recommendation?

Jorge: I do.

How did that feel – getting legal after all these years?

Jorge: It was a lot bigger deal than I ever anticipated. Obviously, I've been in the cannabis world for decades and I've seen a heck of a lot of things. But the part that got me was when I went into the dispensary with my card, in the state of California in the United States of America, where it has always been fucking illegal for my whole fucking life, and then I walk into this nice establishment, out in the open, and speak with a person behind a counter who offers me the medical cannabis of my choice at a reasonable price.

I remember going outside with this small paper bag of cannabis with the receipt stapled to the outside. I held it up, looked at it and started crying.

What was in the bag?

Jorge: Blue Dream and Bubba Kush. I remember that Blue Dream so well.

What effect do you think lab testing has had on cannabis growers?

Jorge: It's had a huge effect already, and I think it's been wonderful. Growers have never had easy access to this type of information before, so now they're able to create an information feedback loop and start working backwards from whatever works best. Already we've learned some interesting things – for instance, if you cut down a plant, separate out the buds, and dry them all evenly, one bud could be 8 percent THC and another one could be 18 percent – from different parts of the same plant.

Most importantly, lab testing of medical cannabis has kept standards high, and that benefits the consumer. Also, I work with Project CBD and the CBD Crew [projectcbd.org and cbdcrew.org], and lab testing has helped us identify just a handful of strains with significant levels of CBD, an often-overlooked cannabinoid with important medicinal properties. Having these plants available to growers, breeders and patients has led to a huge new interest in CBD-rich medicine. CBD is not the part that gives you that soaring high or that couch-lock stone – it's not a psychoactive effect – so many breeders have previously been breeding it out of their strains without realizing it.

As I'm sure you know, there's a facility in Mississippi where the federal government grows cannabis to supply the four patients left in their otherwise defunct medical marijuana program, as well as for research purposes. Now, if you were named the head gardener of that facility – charged with growing research-grade cannabis and given full federal immunity to do so – what would you like to accomplish?

Jorge: First, I'd get the hell out of Mississippi! [laughs] I only say that because it's extremely hot at night there and very humid – you'd lose part of your season in greenhouses, and that's how I'd want to grow. So, I'd probably put the facility in Southern California, where you'd have the best season all year round. Then I'd breed cannabinoid-specific plants – a THC-only version, a CBD-only version, and then all of the other cannabinoids right down the line. At that point, I would provide them to researchers, and pretty soon we would have a new broad base to collect information from.

Do you see the pharmaceutical companies getting involved in cannabis?

Jorge: They're already involved: GW Pharmaceuticals in the UK makes Sativex, a whole-plant extract of marijuana that's available in several countries to treat MS.

Naturally, the rest of that industry sees the potential in this plant, and they're perfectly happy to profit off of it any which way they can. But the thing is, Sativex is really expensive when compared to homegrown or even black-market cannabis. Doctors have been apprehensive to prescribe it because it's so expensive. Which means even people who do get a prescription, they will generally still go to the black market as well because it's more affordable.

That's why I think it's just going to be hard as heck to get people to stop growing this plant, no matter what. We've already tried sending tons of people to jail and that didn't stop them, so I

don't see what the pharmaceutical companies can do. I mean, even though this is illegal [holds up a jar of cannabis], at least federally, it's still cheaper than the prescription drug Sativex. And even in states where marijuana is completely illegal, it's still cheaper than Sativex. So that's a clue right there!