

Weed celebrity and author Jorge Cervantes visits Portland (Q&A)



Jorge Cervantes, 61, stopped in Portland this week to talk about his work and changes in the marijuana industry. Cervantes, who was born in Eastern Oregon, is considered to be an authority on marijuana cultivation. *(Noelle Crombie/The Oregonian)*

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Before Internet chat rooms, before Instagram, Twitter and YouTube, there was [Jorge Cervantes](#).

Cannabis growers troubleshooting their illicit crop turned to Cervantes for advice on everything from finding the right soil to picking the best lights. Cervantes' books, especially his "Indoor Grower's Bible," became essential reading for anyone serious about growing pot.

Now the Ontario native who once received [a lifetime achievement award from High Times magazine](#) has written [the Cannabis Encyclopedia](#). The self-published tome clocks in at 600 pages and serves as an exhaustive compendium of marijuana gardening.

Not so long ago, Cervantes grew only indoors and dressed in disguise, in part to hide his identity from law enforcement. Today Cervantes, 61, splits his time between a home in Spain and another in Sonoma, Calif., where he grows his favorite "haze" strains in his yard.

He stopped in Portland this week on his way to Seattle Hempfest, where he plans to promote his book. I caught up with him to talk about the evolution of marijuana cultivation, the commercialization of the pot industry and the emergence of dab culture. (This interview has been edited for length and clarity.)

Q: What's it like to be famous for your expertise in cannabis cultivation?

A: It's a little unnerving to me. It's a little weird because I have helped several million people learn how to grow and grow well. They have been incredibly successful because I have given good, clean, simple, honest information.

Q: You were born George Van Patten. Why do you go by Jorge Cervantes?

A: Cervantes is my wife's name and then (Spanish writer) Miguel de Cervantes was one of my favorite authors. He has always been a hero of mine. He has a strong personality, a tough guy.

Q: What was your first experience with cannabis?

A: We were told not to smoke it because within a few months we would be shooting heroin. That was 1971. I thought, well, oh boy, that's real scary. And I talked to other people and they said it wasn't so. We bought an ounce of Mexican dirt weed and put it in one of my dad's tobacco pipes and drove around and smoked it until it was gone and it was the first time I had ever had the effects of cannabis. It was a real pleasant feeling. I thought, well, gee, these guys told me I would do heroin, which I have never done. People said I would go crazy, a menagerie of bad things that didn't happen. So I lost trust. They either lied to me or they were stupid.

Q: When did you start growing cannabis?

A: When I got out of university in 1977. I got out and I started growing because I didn't know what else to do. I was well educated but would prefer to be a gardener. I was good at it. My fingers were green.

Q: What was the culture of growing like when you first started?

A: Everybody was growing indoors. I already had a good history of growing and I found that people were making up lies and making it all real complicated. I thought, they don't need to do that. I thought I could write all this down. Since they didn't have enough information, I thought I could provide that and it wouldn't be as scary as growing. Most people don't admit that you just get scared.

Q: When you first started writing about cannabis, there weren't many resources for growers. Today people turn to the Internet and the increasing number of other growers for advice. Who is your audience today?

A: Anybody that wants to grow cannabis. Anybody that wants to make a concentrate out of cannabis.

Q: How can newer growers determine whether the information they're getting from the Internet or other growers is reliable?

A: It's difficult to find reliable information. Look for information that is not sales based. Here is an example: The most money in the cultivation business is in selling fertilizers. You look at any hydroponic store or garden store and you have 20 or 30

types of fertilizer all for one plant. You go into a nursery and you have 10 kinds of fertilizer for 20,000 different plants. The equation is off base. It's difficult to find good, clean, solid information. It's easier now than it was – much easier now – but there is still misinformation.

Q: What is the most common misinformation about growing cannabis?

A: That you need specific fertilizers or specific soil mixes to make your cannabis grow well. People spend a lot of money on soil mixes and fertilizers that are just unnecessary.

Q: Do you think it's a better product compared to when you first got into the business?

A: Information and the plant are much more widely disseminated. Seeds are easy to ship and that's good. You have a bigger gene pool. That way the bigger gene pool, the more possible combination there are. That is because of the internet and so many growers growing. There are more varieties than ever and there is more variety within those varieties.

Q: The Oregonian recently [published an investigation](#) that revealed widespread pesticide contamination of marijuana concentrates. What do you think of growers relying on pesticides?

A: It's a real problem. It's a serious problem. You are dealing with people in an unregulated industry and, I can't believe I am going to say this, but this industry needs regulation for health reasons. You treat it as a food crop. You treat it as lettuce or peppers.

Q: Is commercialization good for the cannabis?

A: Whether it's good or bad, it's not going to stop so we have to play with it. That is the game on the table. Second, it's going to change many, many people's lifestyles, people that have made a living or a partial living at this because the price of cannabis was, a couple years ago, \$3,000 a pound in California, and now it's gone down to \$2,000 and in another two or three months it will be \$1,000 to \$800 for outdoor and \$1,500 to \$1,800 for indoor. There is just not as much money in the equation. People

have been counting on a higher price and their production costs are way too high. They have to cut production costs and it's not pleasant. The second thing that is going to happen is instead of growing it in clandestine conditions in the mountains and using expensive techniques, they are going to grow it on flat land with a tractor. It is turning from a cottage industry into a factory industry.

Q: What are your thoughts on the state of cannabis cultivation in Oregon?

A: There is more cannabis cultivation now more than ever and it will only grow. It's commonplace. It's going to continue to be strong.

Q: What do you think of dab culture?

A: I don't like it at all. That stuff is way too strong. You don't need to smoke that much cannabis or consume that much cannabis. People develop a tolerance for it. A lot of those concentrates are full of adulterants. It's dangerous. If you use any petroleum solvents, you can blow yourself up. The reason we are able to have this dab culture is because there is an excess of cannabis. It's so cheap.

Q: What is your preferred method of consuming cannabis?

A: I like smoking joints. I am an old guy. It's not necessarily the best way to consume. Bong hits are a good way and vaporizers are too but smoking joints is convenient. It's not going to get you super high really fast. Sometimes the bong is OK, but you get high too fast and it's unpleasant. It changes your state too fast. If I were younger, I may have a different opinion.

-- Noelle Crombie