



Adam Momirov and one of his giant pumpkins

Adam and the giant pumpkin

A single thought by Adam Momirov started a hobby that would ultimately produce thousands and thousands of pounds of pumpkin. The thought was, “I wonder how big these things really get,” while he stared at a pumpkin he had grown from a seed. “That just kind of led me down a rabbit hole,” Momirov said, eventually leading to him being named one of the world’s top growers.

“I’ve just kind of ran with it and just continuously tried to improve my personal best weights every year,” the Alliance, OH Branch 297 member said.

The process of growing giant pumpkins takes months, and each year he grows only three in his yard. Each pumpkin takes up about 1,000 square feet of land. He starts the seeds indoors in early April, then moves them to a heated greenhouse outside. Normally several pumpkins grow on one vine, but once he pollinates a pumpkin, he makes sure to remove all the other small pumpkins from the

vine so the plant’s energy is completely focused on just the one pumpkin that grows to maturity.

He spends about 30 minutes tending to the pumpkins before work and 45 minutes to an hour tending to them at night. “It’s a lot of work to even grow one,” he said, adding that it’s worth it to him because “it’s really rewarding when you take something from a seed, you know, and start it and you see life and it just kind of grows and you keep it healthy. And next thing, you have a 2,000-pound-plus pumpkin.”

Momirov said that the process can be difficult given the environmental elements present in Ohio. The pumpkin patch uses heating cables and protective structures to protect from the environment, such as humidity, rain, cold, hail and major storms. He uses fungicides and insecticides regularly to prevent diseases and insects from killing the plants.

This is important, because pumpkins must meet strict physical require-

Momirov grows
a giant pumpkin
from a single seed.



ments to be eligible for competition, including being free of rot, large cracks and leaking.

"It's amazing," Momirov said. "One little bug can carry a bacteria that infects your plant."

His pumpkins' appearances, specifically their roundness and orangeness, have always been something Momirov takes pride in. When he began about six years ago, his first-ever pumpkin of 1,086 pounds—on the small side for a giant pumpkin—won the Howard Dill Award, which is given to a pumpkin that has a minimum weight of 500 pounds and is orange, round, and free of cracks and rot.

"Not knowing really what I was doing, I actually did pretty well," he said about his first pumpkin. "That very first pumpkin I grew was probably the most memorable one."

In his pumpkins he values appearance as well as weight. He seldom grows non-orange pumpkins, selectively cross-pollinating orange pumpkin seeds. "I think pumpkins should be orange," he said. "Like, to me, a pumpkin is orange."

Most competitions are won based on weight, and Momirov's pumpkins have only grown in size since his first.

"The one last year that I grew that weighed 2,273 pounds, that's probably my second favorite just because that's a huge pumpkin," he said of his personal best. "It was a huge accomplishment for somebody who just kind of started out growing pumpkins."

Once he has grown his giant pumpkins, Momirov picks one and takes it to a "weigh off," where pumpkin growers gather to compete on who has the biggest pumpkin. He prefers local competitions due to the difficulty in transporting the pumpkins.

To get a pumpkin to a competition, he has to "just kind of baby it the whole

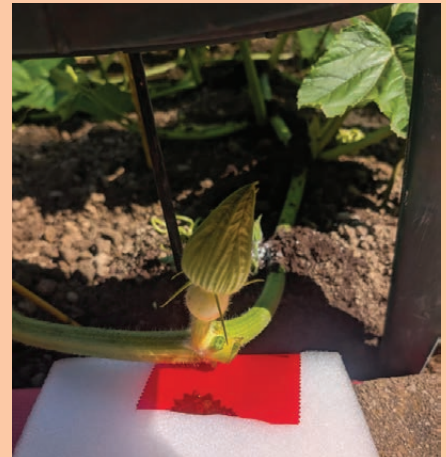
way," he said. He and a friend use straps and slowly raise the pumpkin with a four-wheeled skid-steer loader. They set the pumpkin on a pallet before using the skid steer's forks to load it onto the trailer. He places 4-inch-thick foam padding between the pallet and the pumpkin to absorb bumps, then straps it down tightly. Finally, he drives slowly and carefully with the pumpkin, stopping along the way to ensure the pumpkin hasn't shifted.

In the months preceding a weigh off, Momirov and other growers estimate a pumpkin's weight by taking three measurements and consulting an estimate chart, but many don't put them on the scale until competition day.

Momirov takes the surprise of the competition one step further and stops weighing the pumpkins a few weeks before. He doesn't know what others will bring either, which further adds to the surprise. The weigh offs aren't only about the competition between growers; Momirov describes them as being "a really fun event" where the giant pumpkin grower community comes together to talk about what they grew that year, their struggles, and what worked and what didn't.

The owners of the winning pumpkins receive prize money ranging from a couple hundred dollars to thousands.

"It's a lot of fun," Momirov said of the growing process and competition. "What I get more enjoyment out of is just seeing other people's faces. It's a huge conversation piece. Everybody thinks it's cool. Like, I haven't had one person say, like, you know, that's dumb or stupid. They just think it's the coolest thing ever. So, seeing kids and just families go to fall events and festivals and having these pumpkins on display, it's rewarding in that aspect, just to be able to see that people are





Momirov carefully transports his pumpkin to the “weigh off.”



enjoying it. I think everybody likes a big pumpkin.”

Most giant pumpkin weigh offs and events are run through the Great Pumpkin Commonwealth, with the Ohio Valley Giant Pumpkin Growers being Momirov’s local organization. Through the Great Pumpkin Commonwealth, he attends seminars, patch tours, weigh offs and the international convention. He particularly enjoys the international convention due to the opportunity to meet his giant pumpkin grower icons and learn from others from all over the world, includ-

ing attendees from Russia, Germany, Denmark and South Africa.

“It’s great to network with other people that have the same passion as you and just pick up little tips and tricks along the way and exchange seeds,” he said.

One of his favorite experiences was meeting Ian Peyton from England, who was formerly the world record holder for heaviest pumpkin at 2,819.25 pounds.

“I got to meet the world record-holder and just have a beer with him,” Momirov said. “He’s kind of like a celebrity, I guess, in the pumpkin world.”

After competing, his pumpkins

don’t go to waste. They have been turned into gigantic jack-o’-lanterns and sculptures by Adam Bearden, a food carver who has appeared on the Food Network, as well as a local Ohio carver. Additionally, they have been in popular influencers’ content on social media and displayed at fall festivals for families to enjoy.

Speaking of family, one of the reasons Momirov has stuck with giant pumpkin growing is its ability to connect him with his family. Before picking up giant pumpkin growing, Momirov’s hobby for years was traveling around the country fishing competitively for walleye, but that took him away from his family for long periods of time. Once he settled into his giant pumpkin-growing hobby, he had more time for his kids, who also help him with the growing process.

They will tell Momirov, “Dad, your water’s still running out there.” He said, “They’ve saved my seasons a couple of times.”

Now six years into pumpkin growing, Momirov has been named a top-10 grower in the world by the Great Pumpkin Commonwealth, a title he values due to his newer status as a pumpkin grower, as some who are on the list have been growing for decades.

“Just to have my name up there with some of the best in the world was a huge accomplishment,” Momirov said.

Whatever he does, Momirov’s goal is to master his craft.

“Whether it’s letter carrying, hunting, fishing... a sport or a hobby or just work, just, do everything to the fullest and then share that knowledge with people who want to do the same thing,” he said. **PR**

