

ST. CROIX GROWERS

NEWSLETTER

Summer
2025

www.stcroixgrowers.org



Pictured above is the
636 Engel '22.
(1454 Engel x self)

Beauty

Summer has come to a close, and it's time for us to give up our best kept tips and tricks for winning a Howard Dill award or Stillwater Harvest Fest's Beauty of the North trophy! "Engel Orange" doesn't happen by chance, and we've got the formula for the prettiest pumpkin in the patch.



THE BEAST



The early bird gets the worm,
but the second mouse gets the
cheese.

GROWING A HOWARD DILL AWARD WINNING PUMPKIN

BY: Alex Bogie

In the world of giant pumpkin competitions, heavy wins the weigh-off, but a pretty pumpkin easily wins the hearts of the crowd. If you've ever considered growing a giant pumpkin for looks, there are a few additional things you'll want to consider and keep in mind throughout the year to win that Howard Dill Award at your next event.

In the winter before the season begins, research and obtain quality seed from a reputable source. Use online genetic databases like Pumpkin Fanatic to find beautiful orange pumpkins and review the history of crosses over time to see a pattern of historical orange and HD winning offspring. Network on social media groups and do keyword searches for 'HD Award' or 'beautiful orange pumpkin' to track down some nice looking pumpkins. Seed auctions also will have orange sets available with photos before the auction. Review the lots and be ready to bid!

During the summer growing season, take the usual precautions and care for your pumpkin as you would others. If not already doing so, you'll want to ensure the pumpkin is elevated from surrounding soil to repel water, use of sand and/or mill fabric, along with a shade structure early on and continued all year is a must. You can start with mini plastic tables, move up to folding tables, card tables or build a structure around the pumpkin. Try not to touch or handle the pumpkin any more than necessary. Consider cutting off the main vine past the pumpkin, any leaves near it, and keep weeds away that harbor damaging insects and rodents. These things can also scratch or touch the pumpkin over time leaving scars. Sprinkle rodent repellent around to protect from little taste testers. Be slow and careful in your movements - a belt buckle, rings, shirt buttons, rivets on jeans, a pen, or even sharp fingernails have been known to slice up the skin in an instant. For weather, I protect from possible hail with blankets or fluffy comforters with a large tarp over to repel away rain. Check your local goodwill or thrift store for cheap items. If you use a tarp to keep the pumpkin dry during storms, use a sheet under it to protect from scraping the skin.

In the fall, or in the few weeks before the weigh-off, consider removing the sheets and allowing the aging pumpkin to take in the sun. The pumpkin is likely ripening up and a little sun can help add some color. As the sun warms the fruit, and the nights get colder, expect maximum rodent pressure. Mice will want to take shelter under it, chew it, or in my case one year, a mouse climbed into the split stem! Hopefully you'll find some of these tips helpful in your next quest for the HD Award!



Left: Adam Toboyek and his beautiful 852 Toboyek 2021
Right: Pete Caspers award winning 1965 Caspers 2023



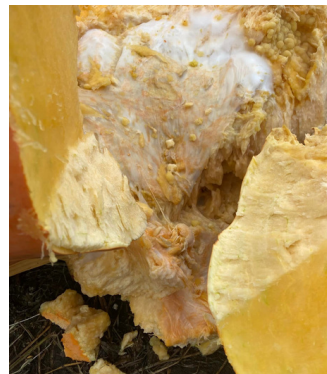
IT'S NEVER JUST ONE MOUSE.

Deer, raccoons, squash bugs, aphids, rats, moles, voles, and what seems like a million other pests are trying to kill YOUR pumpkin! Even rural growers worry about the cows getting out and stomping all over their prize patch. One of the more common snack monsters is mice. You might not see them, but trust that they are trying to make a tiny village inside your giant! Learn from our mistakes, and take back control of your pumpkin patch.

How do you know if you even need to worry about mice in your patch this year? ...One, always worry! And two, inspect your pumpkin every day. Feel around the lower edge of your pumpkin for bite marks, and inspect the sand under it for any movement. If the mice are interested in your giant, you will likely see sand pushed around. You may also see mouse droppings, or smell a musky odor.

Mice also love things to eat and places to hide. Don't let your weeds and grass get too tall and go to seed! Not only does this provide critters a place to hide, but mice also love to eat the seeds that fall from overgrown plants. Avoid this disaster by pulling weeds early in the season, and don't stop! Additional ways to prevent a mouse family from ruining your life include sprinkling a heavy dose of cayenne pepper circumferentially around the base of your pumpkin, and getting a patch cat! (The cayenne pepper alone can be a huge help. The mice don't like to inhale it, and tend to stay away). Some articles may suggest planting things like marigolds and onions to deter mice, but believe us when we say THIS DOES NOT WORK! They don't care about the floral arrangement in front of their shiny orange dinner plate.

Forgot to sprinkle cayenne pepper? Didn't let your pet cat out to hunt? There are still ways to take care of the problem. Some of our favorites include tamper proof bait stations, snap traps, and a 5 gallon bucket with an auto-resetting flip lid. Just remember to be environmentally conscious in regards to rodenticides. All chemicals designed to kill mice are also toxic to birds and pets. Do your research, and choose the best treatment for your patch!



Miss Minnesota 2025

Emma Vrieze

TO PRESENT THE BEAUTY OF THE NORTH
TROPHY AT STILLWATER HARVEST FEST ON
OCTOBER 11TH, 2025!



Emma Vrieze, Miss Minnesota 2025 is the recipient of a \$10,000 educational scholarship and is currently representing Minnesota at the 2026 Miss America competition.

Vrieze is a Nursing student with a Psychology Minor at Minnesota State University Moorhead and a Float Team Nursing Assistant at Essentia Health. Her community service initiative, which she will promote during her year of service, is Swim With Knowledge: Water Safety.

"As a competitive swimmer, lifeguard, swimming lessons instructor, pool manager, swim coach, and water skier, I have learned the importance of staying safe around the water," Vrieze said. "Through these jobs and hobbies, I've grown a strong passion for educating people of all ages about water safety."

The St. Croix Growers Association is incredibly proud of Emma's accomplishments, wish her well in the Miss America competition, and look forward to her appearance at the Stillwater Harvest Fest Giant Pumpkin Weigh Off!

GROWER SPOTLIGHT

Ben Polzin

Ben is probably the busiest growers we've ever interviewed. He's part owner of Down to Earth Garden Center in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and in charge of all the retail operations and growing farm! His accomplishments don't stop at businessman, as he lives on 60 acres with his wife, son, 3 dogs, 1 cat, and chickens! He also loves to fill his already crazy schedule with traveling, hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, fireworks, and vintage sports collectables. (We thought pumpkin growers couldn't travel?? How does he do it all?!)



- 1. What's your favorite part about your job?** My favorite part is that I get to do something different every day. My tasks change with the seasons and staff needs. I can go from unloading a semi load of trees to making a marketing video in a matter of minutes.
- 2. What made you want to grow giant pumpkins?** My Grandmother got me into gardening and my favorite fruit to grow were pumpkins as a child. Something about harvesting them in the Fall when they matured was just special to me. I grew a few giants when I was in high school and got back into competitive growing about 5 years ago when Altoona started the River Prairie Ginormous Pumpkin Festival.
- 3. What are your short term gardening goals?** I really want to grow 3 pumpkins over 2k in the same year. I just need to stop blowing them up during the season.
- 4. What is your BIGGEST dream for your pumpkin growing?** Beat Travis for the world record of course!
- 5. What's your favorite food?** Pumpkin Pie of course!

6. **What's the best advice you've ever received?** You can only control what you can control. Don't get worked up about things that are out of your control. Things always work out for the better with time.

7. **What's your go to fertilizer? (If you had to pick)** If I had to pick just one, I would go with Espoma Bio-Tone. It is a great starting point and has a wide variety of ingredients.

8. **What's something you learned the hard way the other growers could benefit from hearing about?** Don't OVER love your pumpkins. I have blown more up from over watering and over fertilizing than I can count. Trust your soil and keep the moisture consistent, the pumpkins will grow just fine without pushing too hard.

9. **How do you feel about your 2024 growing season? We hear you got robbed of a jacket.** It was a bittersweet season. We lost 2 big pumpkins again in 2024, one from a mouse and one from a soil disease issue. So, we ended up having to take 2 pumpkins from our side patch to weigh offs and ended up missing the requirement for our jacket by .5 of a lb. That hurt a little. It was still a fun season being in the garden and glad we were able to get 3 to the scale.

10. **Why might your patch differ from others, and have you faced any challenges because of it?** I do grow two pumpkins in our high tunnel and usually 2 outside. We have tried to embrace technology where we can as well. We have soil moisture/temp meters, watering, cameras, lights and heaters all on automation. Growing in a high tunnel does come with some differences in growing though, but I enjoy learning the differences.

11. **What's something you're proud of?** I am very proud of our son and the young man he is becoming. He made the roster to one of the best 11u traveling baseball teams in the state this year, and it will be fun watching him play around the state this summer. However, that may cut into the pumpkin growing a bit, lol.

12. **What's your personal best for an Atlantic giant?** 2061, however it was DMG. It got a pin hole in it early August so we stopped watering and fertilizing it at that point. It made it to a late September weigh off to get an official weight. It was on pace to be a HUGE pumpkin.

LOOKING AHEAD



Stillwater Harvest Fest

Saturday, October 11th, 2025

10am - 6pm

101 Water Street S

Stillwater, MN 55082