

# There's A Stroller In That Combine

"I'm a big John Deere guy and wanted to have some fun," says Taylor Neth about his "baby stroller makeover." FARM SHOW readers may remember his first combine stroller (Vol. 46, No. 5) for his son, Braxton, which was made of a wooden frame and cardboard surrounding a basic stroller.

When his daughter, Hadley, was born in 2023, Neth decided it was time for Combine Stroller 2.0. He upgraded to thin plywood instead of cardboard and changed the corn head to a spinning soybean head.

The head is made with cotter pins covered with tire valve caps. The PVC auger rotates in and out over a steel ball. The polyester foam wheels' mini rods and acorn nuts make them look real.

"I tried to duplicate an X9 series combine as much as possible. The whole thing comes apart in 10 pieces," Neth says.

He credits his dad, Wade, a retired autobody professional, for using automotive paints to give the combine a first-class paint job.

Finished with a yellow stripe and John Deere logos, the combine stroller was a hit at farm shows, Husker Harvest Days and a Camp Creek Thresher event this summer.



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And, though he's a little too big, 3 1/2-year-old Braxton managed to squeeze in the small stroller inside the combine.

Neth's wife, Chera, is impressed with the details and that it's not too heavy (about 40 lbs.) and easy to handle. Plans were to use it for Halloween. Indeed the kids will want to ride in it every chance they can get—until they no longer fit.

"I just want to have some fun with the kids," Neth says.

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About the size of a large grape, Kiwiberries are high in vitamins and antioxidants.

## Kiwiberries May Be The Next Big, Little Fruit

University researchers from New Hampshire to Oregon, including some in Ohio and Michigan, are promoting the potential of kiwiberries. In New Hampshire, the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) project works with around 40 farmers to expand interest in the small fruit. About the size of a large grape, hairless kiwiberries are very high in vitamin C and other vitamins, antioxidants and naturally occurring sugars.

Although kiwiberries were introduced to the U.S. in the late 1800s, they haven't been widely developed as a commercially viable fruit. One reason is that vines are either pollen-producing males or fruit-producing females. Vines could be cultivated for years before they flowered and revealed their sex, but that's no longer the case.

The University of New Hampshire started its kiwiberries research and breeding program in 2013 and developed DNA sequencing, making it possible to determine a kiwiberries vine's gender at germination.

The program also developed improved varieties and economically viable production practices, including innovative canopy management, increased planting density and pruning, irrigation and fertilization protocols.

According to Iago Hale, the research effort has reduced the average flowering time from 5 to 6 years to just 3 years. These innovations have allowed the screening of thousands of potential kiwiberries varieties in the 1 1/2-acre research vineyard.

"So far, nearly 30 selections have been advanced to replicated trials, and the prospect of releasing new elite varieties to support this emerging industry is coming to fruition," says Hale in a recent report.

The SARE project will evaluate 20 of the University's varietal selections across the 40 pilot vineyards. As part of the USDA-

funded research in New Hampshire, the New Hampshire Agricultural Experiment Station has published an online guide titled "Growing Kiwiberries in New England." The guide covers all aspects of production, from vineyard establishment to post-harvesting, storage and ripening. It also includes enterprise analysis for people considering developing a kiwi vineyard.

Kiwi Korner Farm is credited for providing much of the data used to develop the enterprise analysis. Dave Jackson began researching, developing and growing hardy kiwi near Danville, Penn., in 1988. He started with a 2-acre test trial block or arbor and has since expanded to eight different arbors across three distinct microclimates on 20 of his 40 acres. In 1990, Holly Laubach joined him at Kiwi Korner.

The farm sells its berries via brokers and organic co-ops in the Mid-Atlantic region. FARM SHOW readers in other areas (but within the contiguous U.S.) can taste Passion Poppers through the farm's Kiwi Berry Direct sales.

For 2024, an order consisting of 12 six-oz. clamshells of Passion Poppers cost \$58.00. Shipping and handling brought the total cost to \$89.90 per order.

Jackson warns that Passion Poppers usually sell out before the crop is harvested and typically ship in mid-September. Contact the farm to sign up for the 2025 Kiwi Berry Direct notification list.

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Smithhisler sketches his design on the pumpkin with a grease pencil and carves with a file knife and ribbon sculpting tools used for clay.

## Carver Turns Pumpkins Into Art

Carving giant pumpkins is a niche art form that Gus "Squashcarver" Smithhisler accidentally discovered in 2001. He had been raising pumpkins and was removing the seeds at the Indiana State Fair when he said, "Someone should carve this one."

With a knife in hand, he took up his own challenge and carved out the logos of the state fair and Indiana Pumpkin Growers. The Ohio engineer has been carving pumpkins and other vegetables ever since.

With each pumpkin's lumps, bumps and ridges being unique, flexibility and spontaneity are important. Smithhisler recalls being asked to carve a map of Asia for a zoo event. But when he looked at the pumpkin, he told them, "That's a tiger," and that's what he carved.

He sketches his design on the pumpkin with a grease pencil and carves with a file knife and ribbon sculpting tools used for clay. It takes 4 to 6 hrs. to carve giant pumpkins that weigh 500 to 1,000 lbs.

"Pumpkins are very forgiving," Smithhisler notes, so if something isn't right, he can carve deeper in walls that are up to 10 in. thick. However, they can also add challenges, like soft spots and color variations.

His most difficult sculpture was a waterfall with a suspension bridge that used the pumpkin's guts for the waterfall. He adds that he also spends more time when he's asked to carve detailed logos. His experience as an engineer for Ohio Department of Natural Resource projects is helpful for detailed designs and making adjustments when problems arise.

As one of only a handful of giant pumpkin carvers, Smithhisler's busiest time is September through Halloween, but he's added other vegetables, cheese and butter carving to his skill set. He also branched out to fiberglass sculptures with his wife and works with another sculptor who also sculpts ice. When Smithhisler retires as an engineer, he hopes to expand with fiberglass sculptures.



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For now, he appreciates his role as "squashcarver." His most unusual request was to carve three pumpkins that fit inside each other with the message "Will You Marry Me" with a ring inside the smallest pumpkin.

"I see it as much as a performance art as just the final carving," he says, recalling how people kept returning to see how his sculptures progressed at an event in Las Vegas.

In addition to making sculptures that can

last for months in the right conditions, he proudly supports giant pumpkin growers. After the sculptures are past their prime, he removes the seeds and returns them to the growers.

Smithhisler travels to events throughout the country and has contact information on his website.

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