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'Pumpkin Person' Grows 'em Different

By Chuck Martin

At Bonnybrook Country Farm in Centerville, all pumpkins are not round and orange.

Owner Bonnie Mercuri grows squatty, gray-green hokkaido pumpkins, tannish-orange cow pumpkins, gray melon-shaped Hopi pumpkins and more than 30 other heirloom and exotic varieties.

"I'm just a pumpkin person, I guess," Ms. Mercuri says.
"I can't explain it."

But she has been raising horses 32 years — much longer than pumpkins. Bonnybrook is a working 87-acre horse farm, offering rides, draft horse demonstrations, stable tours and a petting barn. With the help of friends, Ms. Mercuri started growing the weird pumpkins three years ago.



She likes to put them on display in her farm market, to show tours of school children and adults that pumpkins come in different shapes, sizes and colors.

With the help of another friend, Diana Alspaugh, Ms. Mercuri has discovered her odd pumpkins also taste good. Executive chef at Sinclair Community College Conference Center in Dayton, Ms. Alspaugh has made pie with the gray Australian jarrahdale pumpkin, cookies with whangaparoa and vegetable stew with roasted Hokkaido.

Not only are the pumpkins versatile in recipes, she says, but they're easy to cook as well. Like she does other winter squash, she cuts pumpkins in half and removes the seeds before steaming and pureeing the flesh. She peels and chunks pumpkin before roasting or stewing.

"I've been into cooking and eating different kinds of pumpkin for at least six years," Ms. Alspaugh says. And like Ms. Mercuri, she has trouble explaining why she's a pumpkin person.