



Closer Inspection



His **"Where the Wild Things Are"** carving from 2009 wraps around the whole pumpkin. Carving it was a nightmare, Noel Dickover says. "You're always holding it at an angle."



Each year, Dickover carves a dragon. This 2004 rendition of fantasy artist Ciruelo Cabral's **Draco Rex**, depicted in the 1990 book "The Book of the Dragon," is one of Dickover's most successful.



When Dickover saw this oblong pumpkin in 2010, he says, he knew it could be only one thing: **R2-D2**. Most of the pumpkins he purchases weigh 20 to 35 pounds.

Dickover says he has **about 70 tools**: He uses a clay loop tool to scoop out flesh. Mini pumpkin saws are for deep cuts. A V-shaped tool creates tight corners and slices triangle patterns.



Dickover uses **three-color patterns**. The black indicates cuts, gray signifies removing the pumpkin's outer skin and white designates areas that are untouched. He estimates he designs 40 percent of the patterns he uses.



Once he **finishes a carving**, Dickover puts petroleum jelly on the edges to prevent them from drying out, sprays the inside with a bleach solution to stop fungus and covers the pumpkin in plastic wrap.

No tricks here

Virginia man handcarving more than 40 pumpkins

BY KRIS CORONADO

On a **September** evening, Noel Dickover sits in his Centreville kitchen carefully carving Betty Boop into the orange flesh of a pumpkin. The cartoon character's vivacious curves are evidence of Dickover's talent — and just one example of the jack-o'-lanterns Dickover will unveil on Halloween.

About 7 p.m. Monday, 40-plus

pumpkins carved by Dickover and his family will have their moment to shine on the family's lawn on Hartwood Court. What began in 1998 with a carving of Scooby-Doo has become an obsession for Dickover, 44, a government contractor. In 2003, there were five pumpkins; in 2010, 45. Today the entire family — wife Nam, 44, son Justin, 18, and daughter Sarah, 13 — is in on it. He

estimates a few thousand visitors come to see the display.

Dickover carves throughout the month, storing complicated works in the family's two refrigerators (and in those of relatives and friends). "I'll maybe get a couple of hours of sleep at night," he says of the days leading up to Halloween. "It's nonstop carving." Here, a look at his tools and his favorite past creations.

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE: DRACO REX AND R2-D2; JACK-O'-LANTERN PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF NOEL DICKOVER; ALL OTHER PHOTOGRAPHS BY BENJAMIN C. TAMKERSLEY