

How I Grew My Arms From 18 Inches To 19 5/8

One of the most common questions I get: “How do I break a plateau in body part XYZ?”

The simple answer is to do a program you have not done before. The biggest my arms ever got is 19 5/8 inches. It took me about 13 years to take them from nine and three-quarter inches at the age of 14, to 18 inches at age 27. That is a long time, and it took a lot of work. At that time, my arm training philosophy consisted of the following:

Because I am by nature a dopamine dominant person, I chose to lift very heavy for multiple sets (6-12). The average rep that I did for arms was, no kidding, 2.2 reps per set. I would typically do sets of 2 to 3 reps of the most bang for your buck exercises like dips, presses,



narrow grip chin-ups, and various form of free weight curls. This resulted in handling very impressive poundages in arm training. As in, doing 275 lbs press behind neck, and 90 pounds strict incline curls. Brooks Kubik and Anthony Ditillo have strongly influenced my arm training philosophy. I remember in my Phoenix gym doing Scott curls with 90 kg with a fat EZ bar in strict form, while my much larger IFBB pro friend could hardly handle 60 kg. Of course his arms where at least two inches bigger than mine.

To sport 18 inch arms is impressive, however, I wanted. Which meathead is ever satisfied with arm size? One of the reasons why I like to train heavy was my travelling schedule. I could find a dip station or bench anywhere around the World, and apply the overload principle while keeping my head at peace. For example a pulley system in Melbourne could have, say 100 lbs, yet feel way heavier that another

brand at 100 lbs in Edmonton. A multitude of physics principle like friction could explain that.

For about another three years I made very little progress in mass development. So one day, I said: fuck it, I'm going to stop making my own programs. I hired Greg Zulak, then editor of Muscle Mag International, to write my programs. At our first interview, he said: you have the physique of someone who has trained very heavy for a long time.

So, I started to follow this training program to break through my plateaus and physique. I brought my average rep average to about eight reps. So I would do something like this: 10, 8, 6, 6, 15.

Or I would do trisets. One thing that really worked was to do a back off set of 25 reps for the elbow flexors and the triceps, striving to increase the load every workout. I was horrendous at doing reps. For example, my first high rep workout, I only did 24 reps at a hundred and 35



pounds in a close grip bench press. And this despite the fact that I could do a 440 pounds close grip bench press.

Six months later, I could do 25 reps with 210 pounds. Yet, I could still only do 440 pounds on the close grip bench press. So, my strength-endurance had climbed up quite a bit, yet with no increases in maximal strength.

However, my arms were getting larger. So for the next three years, I would train arms with high reps 70% of the time, to ensure muscle mass gains. The remaining 30%, I would train heavy (3-5 reps), in order to grow my maximal strengths. This approach paid off, as my arms went from 18 inches to 19 5/8 inches in three years. This prompted people to suggest that I try to compete at the national level and masters

bodybuilding. To be fair, I could not give a rat's ass about entering a bodybuilding contest.

So what made a difference? These are things that DID WORK for me:

1. Higher training volume as measured in total reps per exercise:

I went from a typical 10 sets of three for exercise rep pattern to five sets of eight, plus a back off set of 25 reps for every exercise. So I went from 20 to 30 reps at 85% of 1R.M. to 65 reps of between 55 to 78% of 1R.M.

Drop sets with the first set at 3-4 reps also produced excellent results. The total reps for singular drop sets could reach 24.

2. Higher training density as measured in rest between exercises:

I shortened tremendously my rest intervals, going from two minutes between agonists and antagonists, to roughly 60 seconds between agonists and antagonists. Rest intervals were even shorter, when I started to do tri-sets.

3. I kept my training frequency for arms at once every five days.

Experience has taught me that more frequency lead to shit workouts with no progress made. Actually I would lose strength and mass. Less frequency meant no progress.

4. Greater use of machines and cable systems.

Because of the high reps, I often used machines and cable systems for the last 2 to 3 exercises of a routine.

5. Train heavy once every fourth workout.

I found from experience that I needed to lift heavy at least once every fourth workout in order to keep up the size and strength of my fast

twitch fibers. Basically, over time I taught myself how to use impressive weights for sets of six or more reps.

6. Start elbow flexor work with either brachialis or long head of biceps work.

Most bodybuilders have great short-head of biceps because of years of propaganda stipulating that we should start with mass building exercises like barbell curls and standing curls.

Which is bullshit, as research from Canada has shown that isolation exercises like Scott curls and incline curls are far better at recruiting the elbow flexors than standing curls. A lot of neural drive is wasted on the antigravity muscles like erector spinae and glutes when doing standing arm work.

So, starting with brachialis isolation exercises such as Scott reverse curls does more for arm growth than standing barbell curls. Same thing goes for incline curls, as isolating the long head of the biceps at the start of your arm workout does magic to your arm growth.

So if you start with brachialis isolation, use these:

- Reverse Curls (EZ bar, Barbell, or Pulley)
- Cross body Hammer Curls
- Seated Zottmann Curls
- Scott Zottmann Curls
- Seated Hammer Curls
- Scott Reverse Curls

Of if you start with long-head of biceps, use these:

- Seated Incline Dumbbell Curls
- Seated Incline Hammer Curls
- Curls on various machine brands, where the elbows are behind the torso: Atlantis, DAVID, etc..

7. Squeeze the bar in both elbow flexors and triceps exercises.

Research is clear on this: squeezing the implement results in recruitment of more fibers. The more fibers you recruit, the greater the muscle growth.

THINGS THAT DID NOT WORK FOR ME

This a list of training parameters that did NOT work for me. It does not mean they would not work for you. The key is to keep an open mind and use what works for you, and discard what does not work for you.

Here is my NOT TO DO list,

1. Straight sets

I always had better results alternating elbow flexors and triceps.

2. Too much machine and pulley work

To grow bigger arms, 10 to 25% of the volume could be devoted to machines or pulley. More volume on machines or cables would result in lost arm size.

3. Slow tempo work in the concentric range.

I am a huge believer in slow eccentric work, meaning the lowering of weights, to increase both maximal strength and size, and so does John Meadows. Slow concentric work in the concentric range like the Super Slow system only resulted in strength and mass loss. This system recommended 10 seconds on the way up (concentric range) and 4 seconds on the way down (eccentric range)

Conclusion

The end justifies the means. Need to grow more? Have an expert pimp your program. And leave your ego at the door. Sometimes, you can't see the forest because of the trees.

Enjoy the lessons and the new growth,

Coach Charles R. Poliquin