

They Use Beetles To Clean Animal Skulls

A company called "Skull Taxidermy" in Deer Lodge, Montana sells "beetle kits" for cleaning the flesh off wild game skulls, livestock skulls or any other bones people might want to keep.

Most people boil skulls until the meat literally falls off but that method can allow fat to seep into the bones, yellowing them. Beetles leave the bones a bright white.

Skull Taxidermy sells a starter kit that lets you set up your own "dermestid" beetle colony. Once your colony is well established, the skull of a deer or bear, or the entire skeleton of a small rodent can be cleaned in less than 24 hours. If you take the skeleton out in time, the cartilage will stay intact and holds most of the bones together.

According to Pat Bannon of Skull Taxidermy, a well-established colony contains about 5,000 larvae. It takes about three months to build his starter kit of 25 adults up to that level. During this "building" stage, and in between skeletal cleanings, the colony must be fed meat.

"I find it's easiest to keep the beetles in 2 by 3-ft. plastic containers because of their portability, although I replace them after a year because they eat through them. I also know of people who use an old chest freezer with ventilation cut in the top. During the

winter months, they have to be kept warm in heated sheds or with heat lamps. It takes very little maintenance to keep the colony healthy," according to Bannon. "The only drawback is the smell that a colony can create. A discrete location or some ventilation is a must. The beetles perform best at 70 to 80-degree temperatures, so keeping them warm is important. They do not go dormant. If temperatures drop below freezing, they die."

The complete life cycle of the beetle is 45 days and it is during the 30-day larvae stage that the insect is most useful for cleaning flesh from carcasses or skulls.

Skull Taxidermy also offers a custom skull preparation service (cleaning, degreasing and whitening) for outdoorsmen who would rather not work with the flesh-eating beetles or chemicals necessary to finish the job themselves.

Another service they provide is skull metalizing. This involves a patented cold metal application process that makes it possible to put up to 95 percent pure metal on just about any surface. The metals they offer are: nickel-silver, bronze, brass and copper.

"If you currently have a skull that is off-color or just plain ratty looking, this process will transform your trophy into an impres-



A Montrana company sells "beetle kits" for cleaning the flesh off wild game skulls (above). Company also offers a custom skull preparation service that includes cleaning, degreasing and whitening (above right). Skull metalizing process (right) makes it possible to put up to 95 percent pure metal on almost any surface.

sive work of art," says.

The beetle starter kit costs \$55, plus \$12.50 shipping/handling within the U.S. Bannon says he cannot ship out of the country.

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Chute mounts on passenger side of Dodge 1/2-ton 4-WD pickup. Both the headgate and swinging panel operate hydraulically.



"There's not a cow or calf out there we can't catch," say inventors Charles and Harry Craigmyle. "All we have to do is drive a little faster than they can run."

Cow Catcher Mounts On Pickup Truck

Charles Thompson and his son, Harry, Craigmyle, Alberta, decided cattle handling would be simpler if they had a mobile chute they could use in the pasture.

To make it easy to use, they decided to mount it on a pickup truck.

Using 1-in. sq. steel tubing, they built two 7-ft. long seven-bar panels. They mounted one of these on the passenger side of a Dodge 1/2-ton 4-WD flatbed pickup. "We paid \$400 for the pickup to use just for this purpose. It has a heavy-duty combination bumper and

grill guard on the front, so we bolted the front of the panel to that. The back end of the panel fastens solid to the side of the flatbed," Thompson says.

Thompson had earlier bought a headgate at an auction that he felt was just right for the portable catch chute. It's made of 2-in. pipe and angle iron. They mounted that on the front of the panel fastened to the pickup and hinged the other panel to the outside edge of it. The headgate is about 2 1/2 ft. wide.

Both the headgate and the swinging panel

are operated hydraulically. They borrowed a hydraulic pump from an old Versatile swather and power it with a 12-volt electric motor. Pump and motor are both fastened in the front corner of the flatbed on the passenger side. They used reel lift cylinders salvaged from three old swathers (two Versatiles and one John Deere) to operate the headgate and panel. A single three-way hydraulic valve allows them to control both the panel and the headgate.

Catching cattle with the pickup catcher is

a two-person job. Charles drives while Harry runs the controls. They've been using the truck-mounted catcher for about six years now and say it works great.

"There's not a cow or calf out there we can't catch now," Thompson says. "All we have to do is drive a little faster than they can run."

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Simple Water Wagon Built From Old Parts

It took awhile, but Gary Toomey, Lake City, Michigan, finally got fed up with carrying water, two buckets at a time, to three horses he and wife Judy own.

Those three horses are pastured across the road from the farmstead, away from the water lines.

"I had a plastic 50-gal. drum that wasn't being used," Toomey says. "And there was an old two-wheeled trailer sitting in the weeds when we moved onto the place."

He put the barrel and trailer together and added some plumbing parts to make a perfect wagon for hauling water.

Once he had the barrel in place on the trailer, Toomey made a fill pipe on top by inserting a short length of pipe with a cap. On front of the barrel at the bottom, he drilled a hole and inserted a pipe nipple. This he threaded into a length of 1/2-in. galvanized

pipe, with a sillcock on each end of it.

He also plumbed a couple of PVC elbows at the bottom and top of the front of the barrel and attached a length of clear aquarium hose he bought at a pet store to make a sight glass, so they can tell at a glance when the water is running low.

"I put two sillcocks on the wagon, so I could attach one to the float in the trough with a hose and still be able to fill up a bucket if I needed to," he says.

The Toomey's pull the water wagon with an 18 hp garden tractor. "Those old steel wheels make a lot of noise but they save us a lot of time and trouble."

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Water wagon was built out of a plastic 50-gal. drum and an old two-wheeled trailer.