



An ordinary garden hose turns Jim Budlong's silos into ice climbing "mountains".

Farm Silos Attract Ice Climbers

Silo ice climbing might inspire farmers to look at their empty silos in a new way.

Craig Schroeder iced a silo five years ago and rekindled a passion for ice climbing from earlier adventures. He pulled out his old climbing gear, updated his ice axe, and headed to the top of his 60-foot silo.

The Tipton, Iowa, farmer raises crops and 3,400 hogs in his farrow-to-finish operation, and had always thought silos could be climbed. He got the advice he needed from Don Briggs, an instructor at the University of Northern Iowa. To prepare students for careers in physical education, leisure services and recreation, his curriculum includes canoeing, backpacking and rock climbing.

Seven years ago, during his free time, Briggs enjoyed helping his farming friend, Jim Budlong. "I was chisel plowing, which is a job you can't mess up," Briggs laughs. As he drove back and forth, looking at the same scenery over and over, he focused on Budlong's four silos. He realized he'd found new heights to climb - something there's a shortage of in Iowa.

Budlong agreed to experiment and the two men rigged up chain, safety rope and ordinary garden hose on the north side of the silos.

"Lo and behold, it worked," Briggs says. The silos iced over, and he had something to climb. The university instructor climbs whenever he can. He also teaches silo-climbing to his students and climbs with out-of-state visitors.

Through the winter Briggs continually adds more ice to his 55 to 70-ft. silos. "It gives you a different climb each time," he says.

Schroeder is always awed by the different formations after an evening of running water. "The next morning is just like Christmas," he says. "It's exciting to see what formed overnight."

Schroeder and his 12-year-old son Collin enjoy climbing often. Temperatures between

20 and 25 are most ideal, Schroeder says, but he's climbed at lower temperatures, too.

"We've even climbed at night with big spotlights," Schroeder laughs. "It's good camaraderie, and it's a good place to train for natural waterfall formed ice."

He and Briggs have become good friends, and both have met many other ice climbers. Briggs says he knows of four to five farms with silos iced for climbing.

Because of liability issues, Briggs says silo climbing may be difficult to run as a business. However, he notes that total setup costs are minimal.

- The silo should be in good condition and made of concrete staves. Most are empty, but ones with old forage that won't be used work even better because the ice doesn't thaw as quickly.

- The anchor for the safety rope includes two pieces of logging chain attached with screw links around the top two bands of the silo.

- Silos are iced by running water through a garden hose attached to a pipe with a series of showerheads temporarily secured horizontally next to the top of the silo. When the water is turned off the hose is drained and taken down.

- Water is only run at temperatures of 26 degrees or less. It adheres and ices quickly on the silo. Briggs runs the water for three days to get the initial ice to build up. After that, running water overnight is enough to rebuild the ice.

- Be careful around the silos in the spring when the ice thaws, Schroeder says. Huge columns of ice fall away from the silo.

- For detailed information and a little silo history, Don Briggs has written a book, "Silo Ice Climbing, Ice Climbing in the Midwest." He sells it for \$15.

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To make gardening easier, George Reisner mounted an old ear corn elevator at waist level, setting it on a base of concrete blocks.

Old Corn Elevator Turned Into Raised Irrigated Garden

After having hip replacement surgery, George Reisner, Jewett, Ill., decided to make his gardening easier as he moved into retirement.

He came up with the idea of mounting an old ear corn elevator at waist level to reduce the need to bend over. He set the elevator on a base of concrete blocks. In all, he uses 120 ft. of elevator in his gardening efforts.

He raises a full line of garden crops in the elevators, including lettuce, strawberries, green beans, and cucumbers.

"It lets me pick strawberries, green beans, and other labor intensive crops level with my chest. I got the idea when I quit feeding cattle. I had a big manure pit and a big concrete floor that I wasn't using."

He cut the drag chains out of the elevator sections and lined the bottom with 18-in. dia. plastic field tile, cut in half. He ran a length of 1 1/2-in. dia. plastic pipe along the bottom, into which he bored holes every 20 to 24 in. to allow water to percolate out into the soil. The pipe is hooked up to a hydrant at one end of the elevator. Then he filled the tile with decomposed cow manure.

"The concrete lot is set on a slight slope, so excess water runs down off one end of the tile and onto the concrete floor. There's very little wasted water," notes Reisner.

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Old-Style Cupolas Dress Up Old Or New Barns

If you have an old barn cupola that has rotted apart and blown away, you don't have to go without when redoing the roof. Polyethylene cupolas can be used on old barns or to give a newer barn an older look. With four sizes and nine colors, AG-CO Products can match cupola size to rooflines and building colors.

"When our pole barn customers started asking about cupolas, we decided to design and manufacture them," says Angie Praay, a company sales representative. Their Polyanna cupolas look like the real thing and accessories, like weather vanes, are also available.

The Model 120 (12 by 12 by 32-in.) is for looks only and is recommended for buildings as small as 8 by 12-ft. It comes in either one or two-piece designs. The larger three models include the 22 by 22 by 50-in. Model 220, the 30 by 30 by 58-in. Model 320, and the 42 by 42 by 70-in. Model 420. All three are vented and screened to encourage airflow and protect the roofline while keeping pests out. All three come in easily assembled two-piece designs and can be ordered in single or complementary colors. All four models are easily attached to the roof and designed to last.

"We live in Michigan, and we have lots of foul weather, so we wanted them to be maintenance free," says Praay. "We use UV protected polyethylene. Our cupolas will never have to be painted. Put it up on the roof and forget it."

Each cupola comes with a hole drilled in the top that is threaded for a weathervane. Hundreds of custom designs from flying pigs to college logos are available. Weathervanes can be ordered by themselves and mounted directly to the roof ridge.

"Custom weathervanes are discounted if



Polyethylene cupolas can be used on old barns or to give a newer barn an older look. They come in 4 sizes and 9 colors.

ordered with a cupola," explains Praay. "Our weathervanes are made from rust-free aluminum."

Weathervanes aren't the only things that come with a college look. Cupolas are available in the colors and with the logo weathervane of most Big Ten teams.

Prices for the cupolas range from \$109 for the model 120 to \$612 for the model 420. Custom weathervanes start at \$49.95. A light kit with photo sensor accessory sells for \$43.50.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, AG-CO Products, 701 W. State St., St. Johns, Mich. 48879 (ph 989 224-7095 or 800 522-2426; fax 800 831-0869; info@ag-co.com; www.ag-co.com).