

He Turns Grain Drills Into Benches And Planters

At about 16 in. tall, old grain drill ends are the perfect height for a bench. For the past few years, Jim Smith of Abbotsford, Wis., has been restoring the cast iron ends and making customized benches for his customers.

"I understand there could be as many as 1,200 different ends out there," Smith says.

He purchased his old grain drills from his father, who was a collector, and from local farmers' junk piles and on eBay. He has about 60 sets on hand for future benches.

The former lineman is a perfectionist and takes his time to make quality products.

He sandblasts and primes the grain drill ends and has them professionally spray painted with automotive paint. He uses red oak and black walnut wood and sands it to a smooth finish, before applying a finish. He often works with artists who make vinyl decals or paint scenes clients requests. Smith's final job is applying a tough, acrylic sealer.

"We have a Green Bay Packer bench, and the grandkids jump all over it, and it still looks good," Smith says.

He also makes planters with protective plastic liners.

He's made benches with ends from a va-



Jim Smith converts old grain drills into beautiful customized benches and planters.

riety of grain drill models: Deere, International, Massey Harris, Cockshutt, Allis Chalmers, Minneapolis Moline, Oliver, Case and others.

The 40-lb., 32-in. benches start at \$350 and go up with more detail and for longer benches. Smith will also work with ends and/

or wood provided by the customer to make the bench even more meaningful.

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Website "Mini Market" Pays Off For Farm Couple

Maggidans.com is a website for mini goats that was started in 1997 as a way to promote the goats that Maggie Leman and Dan Dawson raise. They recently started selling products on the website that they developed themselves, and business is booming.

"After developing our hand-pumped milker (Vol. 31, No. 5), we decided to start selling it on our website," says Leman. "Then we developed a maternity kit to use during kidding season. It isn't unique, but the booklet we include covers from two weeks before kidding to what to do if the kids aren't born right as well as what a normal birth should look like."

Soon more products followed. They've since added a fecal kit with a microscope and multiple tests for parasites. Leman says that again it's the information included that adds value to the kit.

"We give detailed instructions and photos of the parasites," she explains. "It makes it easier to understand what you're looking at."

The latest product added to the site is a "suitcase stanchion". The portable stanchion platform folds up into a suitcase-style

case. The larger size is 24 by 48 by 2 in., yet weighs only 30 lbs. The smaller one, suitable for pygmy or miniature goats, is 21 by 36 by 2 in and weighs 26 lbs. The pvc supports and expanded metal platform will support more than 200 lbs.

"We have an older style portable stanchion, but it requires two people to move it around," says Leman. "With our suitcase stanchion, you can pick it up easily and move it. It uses a snap together design so there are no pins or wing nuts to get lost."

Getting a small group of goats to a feed trough is easy with a Maggidan's Herd Holder. The 8-ft. lead has a series of snaps that hold up to five goats in a line with a snap on either end attached to posts or a fence. Like many of their other products, the \$15 lead was developed out of need for use with their own goats.

"We need a lot of leads around our farm, and one day Dan was playing around with poly rope and a splicer and figured the distance needed between," says Leman. "I use mine every day at home and at shows. Other people saw it and wanted one."



A North Carolina couple has developed a website where they sell a variety of products for mini goats. Their latest product is a portable stanchion platform.



Since building the website, Leman and Dawson have added a number of booklets and other goat keeping supplies and tools to it. "Construction of the site was a breeze," she says. "PayPal makes it so easy to collect payment. Although it takes time to learn, now I can change it quickly. I used Front Page software on the site itself."

Keeping orders straight is the biggest challenge. However, as the website has grown with new products, keeping the site consistent is an ever-increasing effort.

"If you make a change, you have to change it in multiple places on the site and also in our print catalog," says Leman. "You really have

to be dedicated to answering emails and running the business seven days a week."

The first thing to do, she advises, is to develop a filing and accounting system that works for you and the Internal Revenue Service. Manufacturing is easy, she says, and so is taking in the money. "It's the record keeping that takes effort," she adds. "After a while it still takes discipline, but not as much time."

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"On The Cob" Popcorn

You won't find Mr. Popping Cob "on the cob" popcorn in big chain stores, and Lloyd DeLuke plans to keep it that way.

"I only sell it to specialty stores and farmers markets because I want to keep it special," he says.

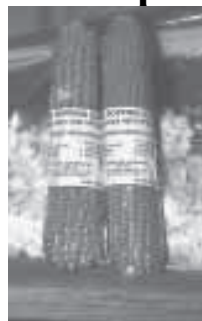
He sells individually wrapped ears of corn. Customers love the novelty of starting with a cob that produces 1 1/2 quarts of popcorn and leaves some of the popped corn on the cob. (It pops in a bowl in the microwave.)

The Burnt Hills, N.Y., businessman discovered the concept a couple of decades ago when he set up a business selling a variety of items from farm producers, including jams, honey and Mason jars with ears of popcorn. "I decided to make the popcorn an everyday item," DeLuke says. He experimented with varieties and moisture content to get the biggest ears with the highest quality corn. He contracts with farmers who grow the corn to his specs.

Eighteen years ago he peddled his corn at small stores out East. Since then, it's been sold to customers all across the country, and it's available at his website.

"Customers come back every year, and it's become a tradition for a lot of people," DeLuke says.

Many customers buy Mr. Popping Cob



"On the cob" popcorn pops in a bowl in a microwave. Each ear produces 1 1/2 quarts of popcorn and leaves some of the popped corn on the cob.

at orchards in the fall when they buy apples. Others use them for Christmas stocking stuffers, Easter Basket or gift baskets. One couple bought 200 of them for table gifts at their wedding. Boy Scouts, an ice-skating club and other school groups use them for fundraising.

Retailers sell the corn for \$1.25 to \$2.50 each. He sells 12 ears for \$25 at his website. DeLuke is interested in hearing from people who want to resell his corn.

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Heat Plant Beds, Not Greenhouse

With fuel prices burning a hole in everyone's budgets, Ron Khosla has a suggestion to cut costs when starting seedlings in late winter. The market gardener heats his plant beds, not his greenhouse.

"We've reduced our propane use by 90 percent compared to folks we know with similar size greenhouses," says Khosla. With his wife, Kathryn, he supplies more than 200 customers with fresh produce in-season. That requires a lot of transplants, and that means starting a lot of seedlings and keeping them healthy.

The Khoslas lay 1/4-in. plastic tubing under seedling flats and connect it to the outlet of a small water heater. The tubing is the same kind used in solar water heating systems; only here it's used to radiate heat, not collect it.

"The key is we are heating the flats, not the air," says Khosla. "A soil temperature probe activates the recirculating pump to push water through as needed. The heater only kicks on when the water temperature drops to the set point."

Benefits include delayed seeding, faster emergence, reduced disease problems and fuel costs of around \$125 per year for a 1,500 sq. ft. greenhouse. That compares at-

tractively to the \$800 or more needed for a similar size, traditionally heated greenhouse.

"We can start our plants a week to 10 days after others in our area, and ours will catch up," says Khosla. "They grow faster and have healthier root systems with more root growth. It's also a dryer system, so we have fewer problems with damping-off disease. If the soil surface gets moist, we just turn up the heat a little."

Khosla admits the system requires more labor on he and his wife's part. "We have short hoops over the flats so we can lay row covers over them every night," says Khosla. "But, because we're only heating the flats we need, we start small and expand as we go. With standard systems, you have to heat the entire greenhouse, even if you only have seedlings on two tables."

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