

John Sherck sells over 50 varieties of rice on his website.



No Paddies Needed For Upland Rice

The number of varieties of upland rice grown on dry land is exploding. John Sherck has been growing rice for around eight years. He started growing only two or three varieties and selling them as seed. That grew to 54 varieties at its peak.

“A lot of my seed came from the USDA,” says Sherck. “They have 800 to 900 upland rice varieties, and most of them are never grown. Others came from growers in other countries, including India, the Czech Republic and Italy, as well as here in the U.S. Some come from people who find me on Facebook or find my website.”

Sherck may get only a few ounces of seed from his sources. He then grows it out to

build up his stock.

“If I have a pound and a half of a grain, that’s a good supply,” he says. “Depending on the variety and the season, a 7-gram package may produce from 5 to 15 lbs.”

Sherck operates Sherck Seeds from his small farm in north-central Indiana. A truck gardener growing mostly tomatoes in the 1990’s and early 2000’s, he shifted his focus to producing his own staple crops. As he explored more seeds, he began selling seedlings and seed locally and eventually online.

Sherck got to the point where he offered a wide variety of staple crops, including 28 varieties of barley and 19 of dry beans. All

were raised, harvested and processed for sale on his farm. They included both conventional and novel crops for his area, like sugar cane, multiple varieties of peanuts and a corn variety that matures in only 54 days. His seed proved popular with people in growing zone 4 and even zone 3, far beyond northeastern Indiana.

“I’ve sent quite a bit to people in Europe and Canada and even to southern Norway,” says Sherck.

Sherck intended to quit selling seed altogether this past year. However, at the end of the year, he announced he would continue to offer rice due to the demand. This year he’s offering 55 rice varieties for sale in 7-gram packets.

“Last year I grew close to 20 varieties of upland rice,” says Sherck. “This year I’ll cut back to around 15, including some older varieties.”

Sherck starts his rice crop about 22 to 24 days before he intends to plant. He soaks the seeds for 24 hours before planting them in plug flats. Most start germinating in about four days. His goal is to get them transplanted before they get rootbound.

“In my area, I can’t direct seed until late May or early June and that’s when weeds are germinating,” says Sherck.

By transplanting, he gets a head start on the weeds, noting that weed control is one reason paddy rice is flooded. That’s not an option with upland rice. However, paddy rice can often be grown without flooding.

“About half of the varieties I grow as

upland rice are paddy rice,” says Sherck. “I chose them because they’re early enough for my season.”

While many rice varieties require as much as 160 to 170 days to mature, Sherck has identified earlier maturing landraces like Mizukuchiine. While it originated in Japan, Sylvia Davatz, a Vermont grower, gave Sherck his original seed.

Landraces exhibit greater genetic expression than varieties, allowing Sherck to select lines for replanting.

“When I started with it, the earliest panicles I found were 110 days to maturity,” he says. “Since then, I’ve come across a few in the upper 80’s and 90’s. This past year, the first harvest of the (early) panicles was 84 days after transplanting.”

Sherck says the rice yielded about 6 lbs. from a 100-sq. ft. bed. He describes the cooked Mizukuchiine as firm and a bit chewy with a nutty and buttery flavor.

Sherck sells his rice varieties. While he no longer offers the hundreds of other edible crops he once did, they can be viewed with descriptions on the archive page at his website. He also has blog entries going back to November 2013, covering his experience growing out staple crops. He lists a wide variety of references and unique tools for home use.

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“From other projects I have built, I knew of a bearing that worked in an inch and a quarter pipe without any machining,” says Esau. “This made it easy to put together a double pivot to allow the trailer to follow uneven ground yet stay directly behind the mower.”



Swivel Hitch Makes Yard Cleanup Easier

FARM SHOW reader and metalworker Monroe Esau needed a better way to clear his yard before mowing.

“I have many trees in my yard and always have twigs, sticks, and small limbs that must be picked up before I can mow the grass,” he says. “I needed a small trailer to help clean up the yard, but a standard trailer would not work behind my zero-turn mower.”

His solution was to weld up a swivel hitch design that could handle the mower’s movement without creating following issues with the trailer. The design needed to allow the trailer to flex while still following directly behind the mower, even when it made sharp turns or reversed.

“From other projects I have built, I knew of

a bearing that worked in an inch and a quarter pipe without any machining,” says Esau. “This made it easy to put together a double pivot to allow the trailer to follow uneven ground yet stay directly behind the mower.”

The final design has a bracket bolted to the rear of the mower, which allows him to hook up and unhook the trailer while only lifting the hitch off the mower brackets.

In total, these four bearings cost less than \$5 each, and the pipe and bolts totaled less than \$10.

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Esau created a swivel hitch that would allow his trailer to flex, turn and follow his zero-turn mower.

They Sell Portable Garden Beds

Aaron and Nancy Erb of Shenango Valley Organic Dairy Farm in Kinsman, Ohio, sell pre-assembled raised garden beds manufactured by Harmony Acres.

The Erbs purchase and assemble these beds to save effort for their customers. “What we like about these beds is that they are very portable; you can place them anywhere,” says Aaron. “You don’t need a big space for this kind of garden.”

Each raised bed is made with rot-proof red cedar and is guaranteed to last a lifetime. They are built on legs that lift them about two feet off the ground, ensuring the soil inside is at an ergonomic height for planting and weeding. Even so, they offer a deep bed space that is ideal for seasonal crops such as tomatoes, carrots, strawberries, and even potatoes.

The models the Erbs assemble and sell are self-watering, meaning that they have a reservoir at the bottom that stores water until the plants need it. This works to keep the soil wet from the bottom up to reach plant roots most efficiently.

Says Aaron, “What’s amazing about this system is that it keeps the soil wet for two to three weeks. You can go on vacation and leave your garden unattended.”

The Erbs started this side venture last summer and have sold half a dozen raised beds to date. They typically rely on word of mouth to make sales, as well as a sign out front.

They offer two sizes of beds: a 2 ft. by 8



Portable raised garden beds have a water reservoir to store water until needed.

in. for \$533, and a 2 ft. by 4 in. for \$413. Optional polyurethane hotbed raised garden covers are also available for purchase. Place them over the beds to turn them into mini-greenhouses and extend your growing season.

If in-person pickup isn’t possible, the Erbs offer shipping for unassembled beds at a pre-negotiated price.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Aaron Erb, 6820 Orangeville Kinsman Rd., Kinsman, Ohio 44428 (ph 330-397-4529) or Harmony Acres, 11565 W 300 S, Shipshewana, Ind. 46565 (ph 260-593-2135).



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