

Prairie Preserve Showcases Old Implements

Nothing new under the sun applies to one-pass planting and practices like seeding other crops between corn rows. Visit the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve in Kansas, where two implements are displayed that prove the old adage.

A McCormick Deering two-row lister planter and a John Deere-Van Brunt five-disc drill sit in the haymow of the large stone barn at the Preserve's interpretive center. The lister planter consists of a subsoiler plow share, planting unit, disc covers and press wheels. In its day, in the early part of the 20th century, it would've been drawn by a tractor.

A large disc with a dozen protrusions at the front of the lister planter appears to provide depth control for the subsoiler plow shares. The planter plate mechanism is driven by a chain from the right-side press wheel, which, like modern planters, was equipped with scraping blades.

The drill is a one-horse machine designed for seeding between rows of standing corn. Recognizing the benefit of interseeding, it was promoted as a One-Horse Fertilizer Drill. A lever on the right-hand side controls the seeding rate. A chain drive from the single front wheel powers the seeding mechanism.

An angled fender bar along each side of the drill turns aside leaning stalks, high weeds, or trash. Meanwhile, angled bars on the outside of each hand grip protect the operator's hands from being cut by corn leaves. A sheet metal corn turner or shield could be attached to the front of the drill to keep from damaging standing cornstalks.

Neither implement has been restored,



McCormick-Deering two-row lister planter.



John Deere-Van Brunt five-disc drill.

although all components appear to be accounted for. Nevertheless, they provided a clear window into past practices being renewed today, if in different ways.

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He's Still Growing Giant Plants

Brian Moore hasn't stopped asking how tall his garden plants can grow. Moore is an avid giant plant grower (Vol. 46, No. 6) who's grown 26-ft. amaranth, 19-ft. teosinte (ancestor to corn) and 15-ft. sorghum. Even his weeds get big.

"A couple of years ago, I had a smartweed that grew to 11 ft., 7 in.," says Moore. "It was hiding behind some amaranth."

Moore exchanges seed with other fans of tall plants in North America and Europe. "I send my seed all over and have gotten seed from a grower in the U.K. and Germany," says Moore. "If people are interested in growing giant plants, I take them under my wing and share my experiences."

His friend in Germany uses scaffolding to support his plants and has recorded a 27-ft., 6-in. sunflower using Moore's seed. It's a cross between a wild sunflower found in a Nebraska ditch and seed from the U.K. The world record is 30 ft., 1 in. with scaffolding.

Moore is shooting for a 20-ft. plant with the wild sunflower from the road ditch. "I want a freestanding sunflower that consistently reaches 20 ft.," says Moore. "Last year, I reached 18 ft., 7 in. This year, I reached 19 ft."

Among giant plant growers, Moore says he's one of a few who doesn't use scaffolding. Instead, he plants a very dense garden with rows of trees around it.

"You won't get a tall plant in an open field because the wind strengthens the stem, and all the plant energy goes into it," explains Moore. "My garden looks like a jungle. I use plant competition to push the growth higher. You get the growth just as it canopies. However, if the canopy gets too thick, they stop growing, so I do a lot of thinning."

Moore notes that some people concentrate on one or two species and only a few plants each year. His strategy is to plant multiple species and plants of each.

"It's a numbers game, which is why I grow a lot of plants," he says. "I can lose 60 percent in a windstorm and still have some growing."

Every year is different, another reason Moore diversifies the species he plants.

"One year, we had heavy rains that flooded the back of my garden, and the amaranth did great because it naturally grows in marshes," says Moore. "This year, we had a drought, and it didn't do well."

Moore saves cuttings from his amaranth to regrow each year. He has also been successful at producing amaranth seed.

"Most tall plant growers who grow



Moore, in 2023, with corn over 20 ft. high.

amaranth get their seed from me," says Moore.

Moore used to sell seed, but now he only shares them with very interested people, noting that their experiences have increased his knowledge. He also shares his growing tips, like heaping soil around the base of tall plants as they grow.

In addition to heavy plant populations and thinning, he gives everything a heavy feeding of chopped alfalfa in the spring. "It has a natural growth hormone," he says. "If rain is forecast, I'll broadcast urea pellets. You need to get all the big things down, like fertility and moisture." Mushroom compost, compost and wood chips are also big things for him.

Moore doesn't soil test his garden. "If the plants look good, then the soil is good," he says.

Moore admits to spending a lot of time in his garden with his giant plants, inspecting and thinning them. However, he tries to keep it in perspective.

"I try to keep it a hobby and not get carried away," he says. "I have too many other interests."

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Lones built a yard playset using a Massey Ferguson 510 combine as the centerpiece.

Combine Made Into Huge Playground

Jacob Lones used his grandfather's 1960s-era Massey-Ferguson 410 combine as the centerpiece of a massive playset for his son Forrest Ray and his friends. Lones says his grandfather had parked the combine in a shed on his Ohio farm in the mid-1990s, and it was just taking up space. "He was glad to let me have it to make more room in the shed," Lones says.

The idea for the combine playset came to Lones when he saw pictures of a Deere 6600 combine with a large bench in place of the header. A slide was attached to another part of the machine. "I immediately thought of grandpa's old machine and said to myself, 'I can build something like that, or even better.'"

Lones moved the old Massey to a level spot in his yard so he and his wife could see it from their house's deck. He jacked it up to take weight off the wheels, leveled it on four concrete footers and left the transmission in gear. He raised the four-row, 40-in. corn head 2 ft. off the ground and built a metal

frame underneath to support it. Metal tubing across the top of the head created ledgers to support wooden deck stringers.

"The deck is level with the cab door, has sturdy railings and extends across the corn head," Lones says. "I connected two race slides and a 180-degree tunnel to go out from the deck down to the ground. Forrest and his buddies can climb steps I salvaged from a 6600 combine to the deck. They can slide down a large enclosed red tube or an open red slide. They can also access the deck by navigating a wooden climbing wall using a rope and foot pegs. A wooden bridge extends to another platform with a tic-tac-toe spinner, a swirly slide, a tunnel slide and the main stairs to climb onto the deck."

Lones acquired the equipment from a company that recycles older playground equipment. "It was just what I needed and in the right colors, too," he says.

"The kids have access to the cab and all its controls, so they can let their imaginations go wild," Lones says. "The steering wheel, gear

shift, throttle, combine controls and brakes are disconnected so they can move levers and pretend they're driving and harvesting. What little kid isn't going to enjoy that?"

Lones says the project took him about a

month to build, working after his regular job and on weekends.

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