

Collectors Love Ingenious Antique Planting System

Tom Billingsley of Buckeye, Arizona, believes the Planet Junior line of antique gardening equipment is an under-appreciated collector's dream.

Billingsley would like to see more people join Planet Junior collector's group and help preserve these rare implements.

"They're a lot cheaper to collect and a lot easier to restore than tractors," he points out. "And they work so well that you can use them in your garden today. They are simply ingenious examples of engineering, and they were made to last. There are probably still thousands of these things scattered on farms all over the country. People used them to plant large gardens and fields up to 80 acres."

At last count, there were 576 members in the online Planet Junior collector's club, where much sharing of information, trading, buying and selling takes place.

There are a multitude of different Planet Junior models, including 4 or 5 kinds of hand-powered garden planters, a cultivator that converts to a planter (with 3 sets of different cultivator teeth), a big wheel planter 2 1/2 ft. in dia., 4 or 5 kinds of rototillers, a small 4-wheel tractor and much more.

The first Planet Junior planters were built in 1866 by S.L. Allen Co. in Pennsylvania. Many more products were to come, although the company changed hands and names over the years.

"The 'Jupiter Wheel Hoe' is what they called the cultivators after Cole Manufacturing bought out the Planet Junior hand cultivator sector," according to Billingsley. "Then, the name changed again to the 'Jupiter Gardening System'. There were eight different types of shanks for it - for plowing, cultivating, furrowing, planting and weeding, etc."

Billingsley says the Planet Junior is a simple, efficient method for hand planting a garden. You can plant anything with it - cotton, corn and all vegetable crops - because it allows you to adjust seed spacing.

In Hunt, N.Y., a company called Farmer

Brown's Plow Shop makes wooden replacement handles. This company also does some buying and selling of Planet Junior equipment, parts and original sale catalogs.

"Planet Junior is great for those interested in planting without bending over. If anybody wanted to really seriously get into Planet Junior, you could make a business out of it," says Linda Brown of Farmer Brown's Plow Shop. "The people who come to us looking for attachments are actually using the units in their gardens, particularly organic gardeners. They do work very nicely. The company was excellent - all the parts are labeled and numbered. This makes it easier for me to be able to find the part and help people out."

According to Brown, there is also usually a full page of Planet Junior equipment for sale on eBay.

Billingsley says he'd love to get all the sales catalogs/brochures and literature on them.

"They were a beautiful system and I hate to see them pass on. With these tools, you could double food production in underdeveloped countries where they can't afford tractors and have an abundance of labor," he says.

Billingsley has five complete units himself, plus a lot of parts, and he'd like to hear from anyone who also collects Planet Junior equipment. In his collection is a #4 planter that he estimates to be about 60 yrs. old, and four newer (approx. 30-yr-old) planters. There is an attachment cradle on these newer ones for hooking them to the back of a tractor.

"To restore these planters, I buy a rust remover and soak them in that, and then paint them and they look brand new. It's a neat way to do something simply," Billingsley says.

Fellow collector, Myron Patrick of Winder, Georgia, says Planet Junior equipment was sold all over the world.

"It was a great company that built quality things," he says. "My basement is completely full of Planet Junior gardening equipment. I



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probably have 15 tractors, 15 to 20 seeders, 30 to 35 wheel-hoes and plows, plus boxes and boxes of attachments for them. I've been doing this for many, many years, and have met just the nicest people. I've gone to West Virginia and Illinois to get stuff and I've had things shipped from New York."

Patrick's collection is especially impressive because he has a number of brand new, never-used items. He says he was just in the right place at the right time to lay his hands on them.

"I have two or three of the push plow wheel hoe and two new small garden tractors (one still in the wooden crate - it was shipped out of Philadelphia during WWII and has wood handles)," he explains. "I have a 1906 seeder - brand new, a new plow, and a toolbar that will hold up to 3 seeders - I have two on it."

An Albany, Georgia company called Covington Planter bought out Cole Manufacturing in 2003 and is still manufacturing and selling a complete line of Planet Junior vegetable drills, seeders, planting units, toolbars

and attachments. For example, the Model B91-92B Vegetable Drill With Floating Cradle Bracket is listed for sale at \$528. This company can be contacted at: P.O. Box 2, 410 Hodges Ave., Albany, Georgia 31702, (ph 229 888-2032; website: www.covingtonplanter.com).

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Tom Billingsley, 1131 N. 191 Ave., Buckeye, Arizona 85326 (ph 623 853-0165) or Farmer Brown's Plow Shop, 10809 Davis Rd., Hunt, N.Y. 14846 (ph 585 567-8158; email: leroyplows@yahoo.com; website: <http://www.farmerbrownsploishop.bigstep.com/generic59.html>), or Planet Junior Collector's Club Online - <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/planetjr/> or Myron Patrick, 449 Miles Patrick Rd., Winder, Georgia 30680 (ph 770 867-9636).

Rope Maker With A Mission

Skip Wise has a passion for making ropes and he wants to expose as many young people as possible to the craft. Best of all, the rope-making demonstrations he puts on are paying his way around the country.

"Shows bring me in to do demonstrations and I make and sell ropes to cover my expenses," explains Wise. "At larger shows, someone may pay my expenses and I will give the ropes away."

Wise first saw a rope making demonstration 15 years ago in Texas and got hooked on the craft. Since then, he has made literally thousands of ropes. Most of the ropes he makes are 15-ft. toy lassos made from 12 strands of poly hay bale twine. As he finishes them, he burns off the ends and then ties a hondo at one end.

"It takes about 5 to 7 minutes to make one," says Wise. "In two days at the Cowboy Hall of Fame, with two machines running, I give away 800 to 900 ropes."

The longest rope he ever made was 175 feet and the thickest had three sets of 16 strands each. In rope making language, strands are called yarn, and as the rope twists together, it is called laying the rope. Through his work, Wise hopes to maintain awareness of how ropes are made as well as the language of the craft.

He has bought several rope-making machines from Fred Mueller, Sheridan, Wyo. Mueller holds the patent on the Rope Master (featured in FARM SHOW Vol. 22, No. 6).

Key to rope making is keeping the right tension on the rope and keeping the fibers

turning at the same speed as they twist together. Normally it requires three people to make rope. One turns the crank on a machine that has three hooks. The three turn independently of each other to place a twist on the strands hooked to each. At the other end of the three strands is a second helper. His job is to make sure the hook attached to the strands swivels properly. He also maintains approximately 20 lbs. of pressure on the strands. Humidity and temperature can affect the amount of tension required.

In between is a third worker with a triangular shaped guide. A circle in each corner of the guide keeps the three twisting strands apart until they have twisted sufficiently to begin "laying by." It is gradually moved toward the twisting hooks as the rope forms behind it.

With the addition of a sliding swivel hook, Wise has reduced the rope making team to two. The device consists of a foldable sawhorse, which he has reinforced with a cross piece on each side. A 5 1/2-ft. 2 by 6 attaches to the sawhorse, wide side up. The swivel hook is attached to the back end of a 15-in. long box made from 1/2-in. plywood. The inside dimensions of the box are 6 by 6 in., while two sides are 8 in. wide. When placed on the 2 by 6, this allows them to guide the box. As the rope forms, it draws the box down the length of the 2 by 6. The friction of the wood against wood and weights hung on the box provide the required 20 lbs. of tension.

"The length of the 2 by 6 is important as



"It takes 5 to 7 minutes to make one," says Wise about making rope out of 12 strands of poly hay bale twine.

material loses 10 to 30 percent of its length as it twists together, depending on the material used," explains Wise.

While the length of the 2 by 6 is sufficient for the 15-ft. ropes he normally makes, it might not work for longer ropes.

Wise has also experimented with a variety

of swivels for the rope forming end. His favorite is fashioned from the front axle of a Schwinn racing bike.

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