

Carrying On The Art Of Broom Making

When Harry Leonhardt watched his blind violin teacher make brooms nearly 80 years ago, he had no idea he'd become a broom maker himself one day. At 89, he makes broomcorn brooms the old-fashioned way at the Broom & Basket Shop at the Amana Colonies in West Amana, Iowa.

"Natural broomcorn beats them all," Leonhardt says. "Broomcorn is a sorghum, from Asia and Africa, developed thousands of years ago." Broomcorn for his brooms is grown in Texas, and 6 to 8-in. thick bundles of the broomcorns' long and stiff tassels are baled in 150-lb. bales. Leonhardt soaks the bundles in warm water for about 20 minutes before layering them and wrapping them securely with wire to the broom handle with a winder.

"The winder is 100 years old and will last another 100 years," Leonhardt says. Powered by foot pedals, an old cast iron chain turns the spindle. The bearings are

made of wood. There are no new parts made for broom making winders, so if something doesn't work right, he fixes or modifies it.

Leonhardt notes that the machine he uses is different than most, as it was made by Amana Colonies residents for Philip Griess, the blind broom maker. The art of good broom making is to use enough fibers to make a good broom, but not so many that the wire can't hold them securely.

"I make 5 to 35 brooms a day if the machine doesn't balk," Leonhardt says. It also depends on how many people visit the store and how many children he helps make witch brooms - a job he enjoys. He's also teaching a blind Amish man to make brooms.

In 1990 the retired salesman made his first broom under the direction of Broom & Basket Shop owner, Joanna Schanz, and has been making them ever since.

He makes 26 different brooms, includ-

ing a golf broom he designed for cleaning irons. Whiskbrooms come in a variety of sizes and lengths. A sidewinder broom, with the handle on the side, gets into corners and cleans edges.

Regular household brooms sell for \$13.75. Warehouse brooms sell for \$18.75. Visitors can watch Leonhardt working during the summer on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, but the shop is open year round. Brooms are also sold via the Internet and can be shipped anywhere.

"Customers like the way broomcorn brooms perform," Leonhardt says. "The performance is what counts. Plastic just doesn't make it."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Broom & Basket Shop, 618 8th Ave., West Amana, Iowa 52203 (ph 319 622-3315; www.broomandbasket.com).



Harry Leonhardt makes brooms the old-fashioned way, in his West Amana, Iowa shop.

Fancy Polish Chickens Dress Up Farmyards

Anyone who enjoys fancy chickens is likely to delight in a striking rare breed known as the Polish.

This unique poultry breed - also known as Poland or Padua - is one of the oldest in existence. The distinctive and striking "crest" of feathers found on a Polish chicken's head is what sets it apart from most other breeds. They come in a vast variety of colors, feather types and body sizes.

Colors include black, blue, white, chocolate, khaki, cuckoo, and buff.

The "laced" type include "silver laced" (white with black lacing on each feather), "buff laced" (buff with light cream lacing) and "golden laced" (gold with black lacing).

"There are probably 20 colors that aren't yet recognized by the breed association but do exist," says Jim Parker, founder of the Polish Breeders' Club based in Cridersville, Ohio.

The Polish breed is raised for its ornamental value, since the bird isn't a good meat or egg producer. Hens aren't used for hatching their own eggs either, since they lack broodiness and will kill their newly hatched chicks on the rare occasion that they do sit.

Though hardy, these chickens need special management to maintain a healthy, attractive crest, according to Parker. For example, they shouldn't be kept with other non-crested breeds because they can become pecking targets.

"They need to be kept indoors in inclement weather because wet and dirty crests

can lead to eye infections," he says. "Crest mites are another condition that's likely if they aren't sprayed with preventative insect repellent."

Parker says bird prices vary according to quality, from \$5, all the way up to \$100 for a show quality Polish. He generally sells good, young breeding pairs for \$25.

"In 2007, I hatched over 1,000 Polish but I've been up to as many as 1,500 in a year," he explains. "If you do the math, they can put some coin in your pocket. Eggs from Polish can sell very well, too. I sell assortments for people to hatch for \$25 a dozen. I can generally take up to 6 dozen eggs a week to the post office to mail out to customers."

"The Polish Breeders' Club promotes Polish breeding according to the standards set forth by the American Bantam Association (ABA) and the American Poultry Association (APA)," Parker says. "Currently we have 146 members in the U.S. and Canada, and we also have members from eight other countries. We did a survey in 2001 that showed there were around 1,000 breeding pairs within the club itself, but I'm sure there are a lot more, since not everyone is in the club. Also, this number only indicates what breeders keep year round - they would hatch and sell many more."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Polish Breeders' Club, c/o Jim Parker, 3232 Schooler Rd., Cridersville, Ohio 45806 (ph 419 227-9385; polishman@watchtv.net; http://groups.msn.com/PolishChickens).



Fancy Polish chickens are one of the oldest poultry breeds in existence. They come in a variety of colors, feather types and body sizes, but their distinctive "crest" of feathers is what sets them apart from most other breeds.



Man Runs Energy-Saving Mail Order Business

When an ice storm wiped out electrical power in parts of Kansas last December, Bob McBroom used some of the energy-producing products he sells in his catalogs. The Holton, Kansas, businessman sells an eclectic variety of items to consumers interested in saving money and being self-reliant.

McBroom runs a rural, one-man company. He selects the thousands of items in Kansas Wind Power's three catalogs, handling advertising, taking and filling orders, and updating his business's website.

It all started in 1975 when he began buying and rebuilding wind generators for people in remote areas. He gradually added solar and water power-generating supplies. More than 30 years later, his catalogs offer everything from generators and invertors to windmill pumps and propane appliances to electric garden tractor accessories and dehydrated food.

"I feel the more efficient and self-reliant people are, the better off we all are," McBroom says.

"I encourage people to save energy and be efficient before they try to make their own power," he adds. "Most homes waste 20 percent of their energy. We have a kilowatt meter

(\$29) to see how much energy appliances are using. You want to know where you're wasting power and then make changes. That's important to do first, so that your generated power isn't going to be wasted."

McBroom says his catalogs include everything customers in remote areas need to produce all of their own power. He also supplies many repair parts including voltage regulators and equalizers, transfer switches, transformers and relays.

He also sells composting toilets, solar pool purifiers, solar cookers, propane refrigerators and bed warmers. A food catalog carries everything from dried fruits to meats to Mountain Chili in pouches and grain mills.

"We have health products too. If you don't have reasonable health, nothing else hardly matters," he adds.

Check out his website or contact him to purchase a catalog: Energy (\$4), Food (\$3) and Windmill Water Pump and Hand Pump (\$5).

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Kansas Wind Power-F, 13569 214th Rd., Holton, Kansas 66436 (ph 785 364-4407; www.KansasWindpower.net).

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