

\$60 Chicken Plucker Works Great

Jean Anderson's \$60 chicken plucker paid for itself the first time she had chickens to butcher. Feather removal takes a fraction of the time it did pre-plucker.

"I can strip the feathers from a chicken in no more than 40 seconds," says Anderson. "I can even pluck the feathers from a turkey on it, but I have to hold the turkey up above the table. With chickens, I just slide the bird across the table."

Anderson had no farming experience before moving to the country with her husband some years ago. She started raising chickens by accident when her sister offered her 25 chicks free with 100 lbs. of chicken feed. When the chicks were dropped off, there were 50.

"My sister thought they were so cute that she bought an extra batch," says Anderson.

Eight weeks later, they weren't so cute and plucking them by hand wasn't fun. She didn't have enough birds to justify buying a \$300 to \$400 chicken plucker. But when Anderson saw chicken plucker fingers in the NASCO catalog, she figured she could make her own.

"I rounded up some old wood, an electric motor and a piece of pipe," says Anderson. "I had to buy some end caps for the pipe and some threaded rod, but the fingers were the

most expensive parts."

Anderson center drilled the pipe caps to accept the threaded rod. She used T nuts with three setscrews on the inside of the caps and double nuts on the outside to secure the pipe to the rod.

"Once I had the position right for a pulley on the end of the threaded rod, I filed down the rod a bit to secure the pulley," says Anderson.

She bored out existing holes in the drain-pipe to mount the fingers, alternating three fingers in one row with four in the next. The entire drum was mounted on the wooden table with a pair of pillow block bearings.

The 49-in. table is the perfect height for operating the plucker. "You want to be comfortable holding the bird in front of you without bending over," says Anderson. "I used Formica for the top so it's easy to clean. I also put a shelf in underneath the plucker to catch the feathers and water."

Anderson used metal flashing for the shelf, mounting it at an angle so water would drain away from the operator.

The motor she had on hand had multiple pulleys on it, so she was able to slow the speed. "If it goes too fast, you'll tear up the bird," says Anderson.

To prepare the chickens for the plucker,



Anderson bought chicken plucker fingers and mounted them on a pipe, powered by an electric motor.

Anderson dips them in hot water to scald them (she uses a turkey fryer). She's also figured out a way to speed the butchering process, which is good, as she's tripled the size of her broiler flock.

"I get volunteers to help by offering them some chickens if they'll come and help pluck,

clean and pack," she says. "With a few friends, we can process 150 birds in four hours."

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Robot Arm Makes Ditch Burning Easy

By Jim Ruen, Contributing Editor

Curt Lamb's weed burner makes burning the sides of irrigation ditches a snap. The pickup-mounted, extendable arm moves the torch from side to side and up and down as needed while Lamb drives down one side of an irrigation ditch and back up the other. All Lamb has to do is extend the arm out from the side of the truck - as much as 24 ft. - and light the torch at its end.

"I control it with two heavy-duty toggle switches on the pickup seat next to me," says Lamb. "It makes burning a ditch a one-man operation."

Lamb built the rig while working as a ditch rider for the local irrigation district. It's designed to be moved easily from one truck to another as needed. A steel pipe skid frame holds a 1,000-gal. propane tank and the robotic arm. Lamb fashioned the arm using scrap pipe, a telescoping TV antenna and an automotive wheel rim. Two 12-volt winches rotate it from side to side and up and down.

The antenna sits atop a 2 7/8-in. steel pipe set in a 3-in. steel pipe pivot point. The bottom and outside pipe is about 4 ft. tall and welded to the skid with several reinforcing braces from the skid. The inside and upper pipe extends through and is welded to the center of the wheel rim.

Lamb mounted a winch to a 6-in. wide, 2-ft. long piece of steel that extends out from and is welded to the top of the lower pipe.

Cable from the winch wraps around the rim, rotating it and the attached TV antenna when the winch is activated.

"I can rotate the antenna tower 320 degrees from the cab of the truck," says Lamb.

To attach the antenna to the rotating pipe and give him vertical control of the torch arm, Lamb had to hinge the antenna in place. To do so, he welded a 2-ft. piece of pipe perpendicular to the top of the rotating pipe and braced it back to the wheel rim. He welded an angle iron to the end of the pipe and welded a piece of pipe to the angle iron. A steel plate attached to two of the three antenna legs, reinforces the antenna structure. A rod inserted through the pipe and welded at both ends to the plate is the hinge pin.

Lamb mounted the second winch to the end of the antenna. He also mounted a 2-ft. length of pipe parallel to the rotating pipe. It was inserted through and welded to the edge of the wheel rim. A short piece of steel with a hole in one end was welded to the end of the pipe to provide an anchor point for the winch cable.

"When I activate the second winch, it makes the antenna pivot on the hinge and lifts the far end of the antenna up or down," says Lamb.

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Pickup-mounted, extendable arm moves torch from side to side and also up and down.



Steel skid frame holds robotic arm (left). Arm is controlled with toggle switches in cab.

Redneck Chipper Chops Stalks Fine

Lisa Campbell had a garden full of sunflower and corn stalks. She couldn't justify a new chipper, and she didn't want to burn them. After making a few modifications to an old lawn mower, she soon had a pile of mulch produced by her "redneck chipper."

The stalk feeder is simple. Campbell cut a 4-in. hole in the deck and bolted down a 1-in. flange. A 4-in. diameter section of stove-pipe fits the flange perfectly.

"I framed a piece of plywood large enough for the mower to sit on it with 2 by 6's around the edge," says Campbell. "It keeps the mower from moving away as it chops."

To reduce blow back of chopped stalks, Campbell lays a section of heavy rubber mat

over the side of the mower she's working on. A 4-in. hole in one side fits over the stove-pipe and holds the mat in place.

"You still have to wear safety glass for the occasional piece that flies out of the pipe, but most of the material comes out the mower's side chute," she says.

Campbell has considered replacing the mower blade with a circular blade. "But the way I have it now is sufficient for stalks," she says.

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Modified push mower does a great job chopping sunflower and corn stalks.