

Looking For “Gray Gardeners”

In the late 1940's, the Gray Gardener was marketed as a “new crawler-type cultivator”. With a 7 1/2-in. wide track, gardeners liked the traction and probably felt like they were walking behind a bulldozer. That appeal continues today with collectors.

“I love these little track machines. I have eight different ones,” says Paul Vanderhulst of Cochise, Ariz.

He saw his first Gardener at a tractor show and took photos. Later, when he bought a track cultivator sight unseen, he was delighted to see it was a Gardener. He was also glad he had photos because the cultivator arrived in three boxes. Even the handles had been cut up. With little available information, Vanderhulst assembled the Gardener and repainted it grey, red and black based on spots of original paint he found.

Russell J. Gray designed the cultivator

in 1947. He and his brother, Leal L. Gray, owned Gray Company, Inc., in Minneapolis, which built lubrication and industrial pumping equipment.

“It had some pretty cool lubers for greasing shafts and bearings,” Vanderhulst says. Unfortunately, Leal decided the Gardener didn't fit well in Gray's line and after several thousand were made in less than five years, the cultivator was discontinued.

“They were a good machine,” Vanderhulst says. “With a track like that, it works well in sandy or muddy conditions.”

Vanderhulst contacted a historian with the company (now called Graco), who provided basic information and specs on the Gray Gardener: 230 lbs., 58 in. long, 39 in. tall, 14 in. wide drive. The cultivator teeth adjust from 9 to 24 in. and dig up to 5 in. deep.

Vanderhulst has only seen one other



A “crawler-type cultivator”, the Gray Gardener runs on a 7 1/2-in. wide single track.

Gray Gardener, which he purchased. Because they seem to be rare, he would like to hear from other Gray Gardener cultivator owners to start a registry.

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Black-Necked Swans Add “Class” To Farm

“They're the Cadillac of swans,” says Gary Guerrero about his small flock of black-necked swans. Because they're not as prolific in captivity as other swans, they're much more expensive. Guerrero sells them for \$2,000 a pair.

The swans are native to South America, but can survive anywhere that has open water year round. Guerrero suggests a minimum of a 12-ft. dia. pond. The swans eat native grasses and poultry feed.

The 9 to 12-lb. black-necked swan is the smallest swan that Guerrero raises. The birds reach sexual maturity at 3, and have an average life span of 10, but can live up to 30 years. A red knob (carbuncle) at the base of the upper mandible enlarges in males during breeding season.

In the wild, black-necked swans are fast flyers, but those sold to collectors are pinioned (one wing clipped when they are young) so they cannot fly away.

Guerrero sells black-necked swans to some zoos, but most customers have private collections.

“We sell all we can get,” he says. The birds are delivered by express mail or air cargo.

Swans are offered at all ages, from juveniles to adult breeder pairs three years of age or older.



“We sell all we can get,” says Gary Guerrero, who raises black-necked swans.

Guerrero raises and breeds dozens of varieties of birds on 32 acres, including everything from pheasants and ducks to cranes, ibis and swans.

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5/8-Scale “Cross Motor” Tractor

Ron Lachniet, Lowell, Mich., built a 5/8-scale “Cross Motor” tractor modeled after the 1924 Case 25-45 tractor that ran on kerosene.

The steel-wheeled tractor runs, rides, and drives almost like the real thing. The tractor is powered by a Hercules 4-cyl. gas engine off a 1930's Deere combine. It has a 3-speed transmission that's chain-driven off the engine and the transmission and rear end are off an old Grand Haven garden tractor. Lachniet fabricated everything else.

“For many years I thought about building a scale model tractor, but always figured I could never do it,” says Lachniet. “One day, my son's buddy told me about a small garden tractor he found in the way of a new road they were cutting. He said I could have it if I got it out of the way very soon.”

The tractor turned out to be a Grand Haven and was just what Lachniet needed to rekindle his ideas for a scale model. “I was always interested in Cross Motor tractors, although there are very few in western Michigan. I started looking at photos and manuals

and decided that the Case 25-45 was the closest to what I was looking to build.”

“I was able to fabricate most everything in my small home workshop, except I had angle iron and flat steel rolled to build the wheels and I bought a radiator core to fit in the outer shell. Also, my son built a die to put the emboss in the spokes of the wheels. He also built a flywheel out of aluminum.

“The gearing was something that I knew nothing about. It took a lot of figuring to get the proper ratio for the sprockets. I was two years into the project before I actually saw a full-size Case 25-45 Cross Motor. After spending some time taking measurements and photos, I went back home to see how far off I was. I found the only thing that was really off was the width of the spokes of the wheels. So last winter I re-spoked the wheels.”

The project took about six years. “A lot of it was redone once or twice because after thinking about it, I would come up with a better idea. Even when I thought I had the



It took Ed Weiss about two months - and 920 cans - to make this 3 1/2-ft. wide by 5-ft. long tractor. The aluminum cans are held together with silicone caulking.

John Beer Tractor

Ed Weiss enjoys tractors of all kinds. The retired Mossbank, Sask., man enjoys restoring real ones, but he recently got a kick out of making what he calls a “John Beer” tractor.

With help from his wife, Betty, Weiss made a 3 1/2-ft. wide by 5-ft. long tractor using aluminum cans held together with silicone caulking.

“It consists of 920 cans – mostly beer. I used 47 tubes of aluminum rain gutter caulking,” Weiss says. “It took me about 2 months to make, using a whole lot of trial and error.”

Making the wheels was a special challenge, according to Weiss.

“The secret was to find the right amount of cans to make the right sized diameter so it would be proportionate to the rest of the tractor

body,” he explains. “It was tricky because the length of the spokes had to fit an even number of cans.”

As he was building it, Weiss painted the unit in sections, using Deere colors. He modified a steering wheel from a used toy tractor.

The couple found a doll just the right size to be their tractor driver, and had suitable farmer clothes sewn for it. The unit also has a cab and stacks for air intake and exhaust.

The mini tractor weighs about 80 lbs. Weiss is displaying it in his large storage shed, and is considering taking it to a farm show sometime. In the meantime, he plans to make a protective dust cover for it.

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Ron Lachniet says his 5/8-scale “Cross Motor” tractor runs, rides and drives almost like the real thing. It's modeled after the 1924 Case 25-45 tractor.

tractor completed, there turned out to be more bugs in it than one could imagine,” says Lachniet.

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