Tow-Behind Lawn Vac

"It saves me a lot of time and was fun to build," says Gerald Auten, Cass City, Mich., about the tow-behind trailer he built to collect grass and leaves behind his Deere riding mower.

Last spring Auten bought a new Deere Z445 54-in. zero turn riding mower equipped with a lawn vacuum and bagger. "I have a 3-acre lawn with a lot of maple trees, and the bagger was too slow. I couldn't even go a full round before the bag was full and I had to empty it out. It seemed like an endless job. My home-built trailer holds 5 times as many leaves, so now I can cover half the yard before I have to stop. And it takes a lot less time to dump the trailer than to dump the bags."

The trailer measures 5 ft. long, 4 ft. wide and 4 ft. high and rides on a pair of 8-in. caster wheels. It's equipped with two hitches, one near each corner of the trailer, which allows the trailer to turn tight with the zero turn mower. The trailer's frame is made from thin wall conduit and sets on a subframe made from 2-in. sq., 1/8-in. thick tubing.

The trailer floor is made from 1 1/4-in. conduit covered with 1/4-in. hard board, and the sides and front of the trailer are made from 3/4-in. conduit. The lower 2 ft. of the trailer is covered with hard board while the front top is made from plexiglass. The top 2 ft. of the sides, top and tailgate is made from 1/4-in. wire mesh door screen.

The trailer's rear door swings to the side for dumping. To dump leaves Auten simply removes the fill tube from the Deere lawn vacuum, then steps on back of the box to tip it.

"I bought the trailer's 8-in. wheels at Harbor Freight but already had much of the metal that I used. I spent a total of about $200 to build it. Commercial trailers smaller than mine sell for $1,000 and up," notes Auten.

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Gerald Auten built this tow-behind trailer to collect grass and leaves behind his Deere riding mower. Trailer's rear door swings to the side for dumping.

Home-Built Leaf Shredder

Mark Jenkins beat the blues of raking leaves and shredding them into a bag with a traditional leaf shredder. He had looked at commercial, pull-type shredder/baggers, but was turned off by the price. Instead, he modified his Murray 20-hp garden tractor with its 52-in. mower.

"It's the best garden tractor I've ever owned," he says. "It has a wide cut, plenty of power and is built tough enough to handle the bagger."

Jenkins installed an old Snapper bagger discharge elbow on the Murray deck and filled in gaps with sheet metal. He also had an old lightweight, 300-gal. poly tank.

"I cut off the top of the tank to make a tub 4 ft. wide, 3 ft. deep and 45 in. tall," explains Jenkins. "I made a simple support for it out of some tubing and attached it to the tractor with two bolts. I then installed caster wheels to either side."

He then used a length of heavy-duty 8-in. stovepipe to extend the discharge tube to the tub. He cut a hole in the front of the tube and fashioned a top for the tub out of a piece of tin.

"It works like a charm running in low gear," says Jenkins. "With the wide cut, it doesn't take long to vacuum up an area. I usually vacuum up more than two tons of dried leaves and grass clippings every year to use as mulch on my gardens."

Mark Jenkins modified his Murray 20 hp garden tractor, installing an old Snapper bagger discharge elbow on the 52-in. deck and adding a 300-gal. poly tank on back.

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"Leaf Spikes" Keep Lawn Aerator Going

Lawn aeration used to be a frustrating chore for Don Pearson of Murfreesboro, Tenn. The problem was, his lawn aerator became completely dysfunctional when rolling over large leaves, especially wet leaves. The leaves would stick to the spikes, making them almost useless.

"I had to stop all the time to remove the leaves, which really slowed things down," says Pearson.

His solution was to attach a series of metal tines to the aerator's frame in order to knock the leaves off the drum. The tines are actually replacement tines for hay rakes, cut down to size with bolt cutters. He measured the distance between the aerator's frame and drum and cut the tines to leave a gap about 1/4 to 1/2 in. to prevent scraping the drum. The tines were then welded evenly between the spikes on the aerator's drum.

"This idea works great and has saved me a lot of time and frustration. The aerator's spikes are able to operate at their maximum capacity, opening up air passages in the ground to help get water, air, and nutrients down to the root zone," says Pearson. "The tines can also be bolted to the aerator's frame by drilling holes in the frame first."

Don Pearson attached a series of metal tines (see arrow) to his aerator's frame to knock leaves off spikes on the aerator's drum.

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Heavy-Duty Leaf Blower

"I recently cleared some trees to make new pasture. I wanted to use a blower to clean off leftover debris but didn't want to spend a lot of money. So I converted a silage blower. It'll blow leaves and small branches up to 60 ft.," says Don Young, Clinton, Conn.

"I go back and forth, clearing leaves and small branches in swaths up to 60 ft. wide at a time," says Young.

He built the unit with help from friends, Jim and Harry Chum of Chum Engineering. "We had to experiment a lot to get everything to work right," he says.

He used a 15-year-old New Holland silage blower. He cut off the tongue and wheels and the blower's conveyor/auger, and also installed a 3-pt. hitch hookup.

The blower was equipped with a moveable band on the blower housing which he rotated downward 90 degrees to one side. He rebuilt the blower frame to accommodate the low spout position. He removed 3 of the blower's 7 blades to reduce the weight and get more speed.

The blower originally had a hole on the back at the bottom for silage intake. He unbolted the back side of the blower and rotated it to move the hole to the top. Then he closed up the hole by covering it with a section of sheet metal.

He wasn't getting enough air into the blower, so he used a hole saw to cut a series of 2-in. dia. holes into the blower's front and back sides. He also replaced the blower's original spout with a bigger 9-in. dia. outlet.

"It turned out to be a bigger project than I expected, but it really does the job," says Young. "We even used a big pvc pipe to make a wind tunnel so we could try to figure the optimum angle and direction of the spout.

"I use a Deere 4110 20 hp tractor to power it. I go pretty slowly, about 1 mph. It'll easily blow leaves as well as pine needles and small branches. I do have to be careful when blowing acorns, which fly around like buckshot. I also use the rig during winter to blow snow off our driveway. It works really good as long as the snow isn't real heavy or more than 5 in. deep."

Moving the blower closer to the tractor changed the angle of the blower's pto shaft, so Young had to replace the blower's original pto-driven pulley with a bigger one. He also had to install a 1-way ratchet slip clutch so the tractor's electric pto would come to a slow stop without slipping the belt and burning it up.

"It'll blow leaves and small branches up to 60 ft.," says Don Young, who converted a silage blower into this heavy-duty leaf blower.

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Not enough air was getting into the blower, so he used a hole saw to cut a series of 2-in. dia. holes into blower's front and back sides.