



Losing his eyesight at age 40 did not stop Dave Hite from gardening. Nylon cord guides him throughout his 40 by 72-ft. garden.

He Has A Feel For Gardening

By Dee Goerge, Contributing Editor

When Oklahoma days are at their hottest, Dave Hite prefers to garden at night. That's easy for him because darkness doesn't bother him. He's been blind since a chemical accident took his sight eight years ago.

The 57-year-old knows every inch of his 40 by 72-ft. garden because he mitered and assembled the 4 by 4-in. treated timbers to create 4 by 24-ft. beds himself. He leveled the 4-ft. wide paths between the beds using 10-ft. long square tubing and boards as guides and covered the pathways with 6 mil black plastic to prevent weeds from growing. He carved Hallelujah on the beam over the bridge and flagstone paver walkway he built that leads from his house to the garden. Eventually he'll put flagstone on all of the pathways to make the entire garden accessible to people in wheelchairs.

Hite bought a 20-acre place near Stillwater, Okla., three years ago that he calls Hallelujah Acres. "My goal for this property is to turn it into a learning center for people who want to learn how to garden and fend for themselves," Hite explains. "Most centers are not equipped to teach like this."

Hite, formerly an industrial welder, has gardened since he was a child. After his accident, it became a bigger part of his life.

"The first problem I had was that I had no sense of direction at all. Overcoming that was a big issue," Hite says. He eventually recalled a Bonanza episode where a blind girl ran a rope from the house to the well so she could find her way there and back.

Nylon cord now guides him throughout Hallelujah Acres. The nylon cords that run north and south are bigger than the lines going east and west so he knows which direction he's going.

He praises the local Veterans Administration for getting him tools that have helped build the beds, bridge and path - an audible level and a measuring tape that clicks and has ridges he can feel, for example.

"My most useful tool is the Pythagorean theory," Hite says. He used combinations of multiples of 3, 4 and 5 to square the entire garden area off his house. From there he measured off the perimeter to set up his beds and pathways. He uses cords with rings on the end that slip over rebar stakes when he marks out lines.

"Everything is accurate to within 1/4-in. That is the thing I'm proudest of," Hite says.

To mark garden rows he stretches nylon cord between 3/8-in. rebar. Hite finds the center of his beds and measures 6-in. on each side to mark two rows. To plant, he spaces rubber bands on a mop handle, places it on the

ground and buries a seed next to each rubber band. If he needs to turn away for more seeds, he places a stick where he planted the last seed to mark his place. Hite recycled a spice container with holes to sprinkle lettuce and other small seeds, which are then raked over lightly.

"Kneepads are my best friend," Hite laughs. He sometimes spends up to 10 hours a day on his knees weeding.

He waits until the plants get a few inches tall before weeding close to them. He's learned to differentiate by feel between weeds and vegetables.

"One of the hard lessons I learned is don't weed corn until it gets three leaves," Hite says. "Corn and crabgrass feel identical. I once pulled a whole row of corn."

He can tell by feel when vegetables are ready to harvest. The only thing that makes him nervous about gardening is getting too close to poisonous copperhead snakes common in the area. His son killed three by his pecan trees.

"The squash bed is the most dangerous for snakes," Hite says. "What I do is move slowly enough so they can leave. I raise up leaves slowly and keep back far enough that if they have it in mind to strike, I get bit on the arm or hand."

So far he hasn't been bitten.

Midnight gardening also has its dangers, as it's the same time wild animals are on the prowl. There are bobcats and even a mountain lion in the area. Hite plays a radio to dissuade them from coming too close, and he's fencing the entire garden area. He also recently found a Cocker Spaniel to adopt from a pound. When he found out the dog had impaired vision, he agreed to take it in. He felt that the dog deserved a second chance at life.

"I care more about what he hears and smells. He'll hang close to me," Hite says, adding he renamed it Gabe - short for Gabriel, the guardian angel.

This year, Hite plans to expand from 5 beds to 12 beds during the March-October season.

Hite sent FARM SHOW photos that he took himself, and he says he would love to hear from others seeking advice on how they can set up a garden of their own.

"Losing your eyesight is not the end of the world. To me, to put seeds in the ground and then watch the miracle that God works with them... I'm amazed at the way he works," Hite says.

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Don Ramberg's knotty pine truck started life as a Volkswagen Bug. It makes a great parade vehicle to promote his family business.



Wood Pickup Doesn't Rust Or Rattle

Don Ramberg gets lots of attention with his wood pickup. The knotty pine truck started life as a Volkswagen Bug, but when Ramberg needed a parade vehicle to promote a family business, he gave it new life.

"I stripped it down to the frame, engine and drive train," says Ramberg. "I used angle iron to frame out the new body, but I wasn't sure how to cover it."

A neighbor had given Ramberg some leftover knotty pine interior siding to burn in his shop. "My wife and grandson pulled it out, saying it was too nice to burn," recalls Ramberg. "I decided to use it for the truck."

Cutting and assembling the wood panels was the easy part. "I had to finish all the wood and varnish it," he says. "I also had to sand down all the angle iron and paint it black, as it serves as decorative trim."

Before reassembling the wood, Ramberg had to finish the rebuild. Because he had stretched the hood, he had to redo the steering column. Eliminating the rear seat gave him room for a set of seats from a Ford Pinto and more legroom. That meant moving the foot pedals as well.

Once the knotty pine was back in place, Ramberg finished trimming the car. "I used foam pipe insulation tubes around the edges of the doorways and other exposed edges and then covered them with Naugahyde," says Ramberg. "The foam gives a little added cushion."

The front bumper was fashioned out of an oak 4 by 4 with oak bumper guards. Lights were trimmed with oak rings, while their interiors were backed with Tupperware bowls to keep wiring dry if Ramberg had to drive through puddles.

Wood under the fenders and inside the fender wells was painted with black top roofing cement to protect it from water.

The redwood with oak trim flatbed sits over the engine. Ramberg used an older style Volkswagen engine. The fan, bolted to the back end of the crankshaft rather than on top, left more room for the bed.

"People love to see it, and it's fun to drive," says Ramberg. "I call it my 'Bughauler'."

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Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Darol Dickinson, Dickinson Cattle Co., 35000 Muskrat, Barnesville, Ohio 43713 (ph 740 758-5050; www.texaslonghorn.com).