

Cool Tool Signs

What do you get when you put a tire wrench, clamp, and a couple of wrenches together? Atlee Yoder of Ontario, Wis., gets an EXIT sign.

He and his family make signs with old tools, machine parts and other used metal items that folks bring to their store, Trail's End, which buys and sells used items and lumber.

"We've got boxes and boxes of old tools," Yoder says. "We decided to make signs to give people ideas and possibly create a market for these tools."

So far, most customers have been business owners who need "exit", "welcome", "enter" and "sale" signs. The tools are secured on barn boards and fit well in a variety of businesses such as rustic furniture stores, antique shops and bars.

The Yoders keep standard signs on hand. But they also make custom signs

with names, addresses or whatever customers want for farms, homes or workshops.

The boards are left natural or whitewashed, and the tools are coated with black or white paint or clear lacquer. To give them an even more rustic look, Yoder and his family sometimes add a barbed wire hangar instead of an eye bolt on the back.

Some letters can be a challenge, Yoder says, to get the proportions right. Horseshoes come in handy for several letters.

Cost for the signs varies according to the tools and metal pieces used, but average \$5 to \$8 per letter. Sizes vary from 3 to 10 ft. or larger.

The Yoders sell the signs at their store (open Fridays and Saturdays and by appointment) five miles from Ontario, and they can also ship.

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Modified Bale Feeder Makes Great Rebaler

Instead of using a bale feeder to feed livestock, Gary Beem uses one to "feed" a small square baler. One of the Palmyra, Maine, entrepreneur's businesses is rebaling large bales into smaller ones for his landscaping, horticulture and powerline customers. Beem wasn't impressed with manufactured rebalers, because the hay came out in bunches. He preferred the windrow left by the Buffalo bale feeder, so he purchased one and fabricated his own setup.

Beem built a conveyor table using a former manure spreader bed chain to take the large bales into the bale feeder, which he modified by replacing the knife sections with square paddles and welded keystick to pick the hay apart instead of cutting it.

The hay falls onto a conveyor that Beem made from an old potato conveyor belt that he widened. Before the hay goes into the small square baler, it's leveled by beaters made out of pvc pipe to keep an even flow.

"The biggest challenge was that a lot of chaff comes off the bales when they are taken apart. We had to stop

and shovel it out (from under the conveyor)," Beem says. He resolved the problem by adding another conveyor underneath that carries the chaff to a pile where it can be loaded and fed to his chickens or mixed with manure for compost.

The whole setup runs off one tractor equipped with a 30 gpm hydraulic system with a 25-gal. reservoir to keep it running cool.

"It bales just as fast as baling hay in the field," Beem says. "Recently, we baled 606 squares from 9 a.m. to noon."

He's made about 20,000 small square bales each year for the past 5 years, and he expects to use the rebaler setup for many more years. While livestock farmers prefer big round and square bales, they are not practical for many customers.

"There's a whole group of people where all they can use is the small square bale. It's the only thing they can handle," Beem says.

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Gary Beem modified a Buffalo bale feeder to make a rebaler, that rebales large bales into smaller ones.



Hay falls onto a conveyor that Beem made from an old potato conveyor belt. It's leveled by beaters made out of pvc pipe to keep an even flow into small square bales, (right).

Seed Grower Specializes In Highway Beautification

Instead of bushels/acre, Delbert Winterfeld measures his crop in pounds/acre. For more than half a century, he has focused on niche crops such as native flowers and grasses. It's not for everyone, he says, but consumer interest is growing and so is his business, Cedera Seed Inc., in Swan Valley, Idaho. In addition to growing specialty crops, he has the only conditioner in Eastern Idaho to process seeds to sell retail and wholesale from his on-farm business.

The Lewis flax and Penstemon flowers seen along highway medians in that region likely came from seed he grew. The Penstemon seeds are also found in mixes to attract pollinators. Other seeds, such as Delar Small Burnet, blend into wildlife food mixes popular with landowners with CRP ground as well as landscapers and

homeowners. Winterfeld worked with the U.S. Forest Service to establish Deustus, a white wildflower that thrives in volcanic soil in hot, dry climates.

He started out in the business with his father in the 1950's, growing seed potatoes, brome grass and Vernal alfalfa for dryland crops. After his father died in 1963, Winterfeld started focusing on brome and other grass seed. By the 1980's, he had expanded into a variety of native grass and flower seed crops.

With a growing demand for native plants, the Idaho farmer works closely with the NRCS (National Resources Conservation Service) to produce seeds suitable for the region, which averages 16 to 18 in. rainfall/year. Even less rain recently has added to the challenge of growing the crops on dryland. But the biggest challenge is weed control and finding licensed herbicides that won't kill the

flowers and grasses, too. Winterfeld grows 20 acres of flowers and sometimes weed control comes down to old-fashioned hoeing.

He also grows 20 acres of forbs, such as Sainfoin, which is popular with cattlemen to improve livestock forage.

It takes two years to establish grass and flower seed crops. Flowers are planted in the fall, and grasses are planted in the spring. Some of the varieties are combined as they are cut. Others are swathed to allow the seeds to mature and dry before being combined.

Flower seed production lasts a few years before the ground must be rotated with peas to add nitrogen. Some grass seed crops are rotated after just two years of production.

"It's unconventional (farming) and it's risky, because many of our users have CRP land, and as commodity prices rise, CRP acreage is falling," Winterfeld says.

Still, there are many farmers with CRP land, and there's interest in the seeds he processes beyond Idaho into Montana, North Dakota, New Mexico and other places with similar growing conditions. Plus, plants that attract pollinators are in demand.

Winterfeld installed his seed conditioner in 2000 so he can process his own crops instead of hauling them 150 miles to be processed. He has more than 30 varieties of flower and grass seeds available to sell in small and large quantities, wholesale and retail.

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