50 Million Worms Turn His Manure Into Compost

Tom Herlihy has one of the longest worm composting operations in the U.S. Workers care for millions of red wriggler worms in 21 160-sq. ft. long compost beds inside buildings.

Because of the robust, earthy flavor that’s a little smoky. People buy it as much syrup as maple trees. The tractors’ fiberglass hood was broken so he replaced it with one he made out of galvanized sheet metal, pop riveting the hood to the tractor’s frame. Then he converted a 60-gal. air compressor tank into a grill and mounted it on top of the hood. A propane bottle mounts on back of the tractor and is attached by a 3/8-in. hose to the grill. He cut a hinged door into the compressor tank and added an exhaust stack on top that he made out of galvanized sheet metal. The tractor’s Berglass hood was covered by a bolt-on fiberglass cover, which is used to adjust the grill’s air intake. The tractor’s 60-gal. air compressor tank mounts on the tractor’s hood.

He Taps Walnut Trees To Make “Super Syrup”

“Black walnut syrup is liquid gold,” says Michael Jaeb, owner of Simple Gourmet Syrups in Millersburg, Ohio. He sells the rare syrup for $15.75 per 8-oz. bottle and never has enough.

Jaeb has been tapping the maple trees on his 55-acre Ohio farm for 25 years but didn’t start his syrup business until 4 years ago.

“I have a fair number of black walnut trees, so 3 years ago I tried tapping them and got just a small amount of syrup. This year I had 175 to 200 walnut taps and made five cases of 4 and 8-oz. bottles of syrup,” Jaeb says. “It looks like a Grade B, dark maple syrup of 4 and 8-oz. bottles of syrup,” Jaeb says. “We want to ensure our end product is the best it can be and the same every time.”

A 1,000-lb. bag of Worm Power’s vermicompost can sell for as much as $400, but most is sold at bulk rates to blenders who create potting mixes for greenhouse plants. Vineyard and turf farms also use the organic fertilizer. About 10 percent of Worm Power vermicompost is packaged for home gardeners.

Herlihy, an experienced engineer, has spent nine years fine-tuning the process at the Worm Power facility.

“There’s a lot of science behind what we are doing,” he says. “It’s not just a good idea anymore. We are linking animal agriculture with plant agriculture, and creating a new agricultural business.”

Worm Power is the largest agricultural vermicomposting operation in the western hemisphere, Herlihy emphasizes that it can be sustainable on many scales. He expects his operation to continue to grow, but notes that dairy farmers with 100 cows can run a profitable side business by windrowing manure and adding worms.

Marketing, educating and figuring out optimum timing and application rates are Herlihy’s current challenges, in addition to his work as an organic waste management consultant.

Part of the marketing includes developing new products, such as bulk liquid fertilizer for hydroponics operations and drip lines in high tunnels. For retail consumers, Worm Power sells “brew bags” to slip into a watering can. Products can be purchased through the Worm Power website.


Self-Propelled Deere BBQ Grill!

When the mower deck and spindles wore out on his 1989 Deere LT 133 garden tractor, Mark Thomas of Jennings, Fla., converted it into a portable grill that runs under its own power.

The tractor’s fiberglass hood was broken so he replaced it with one he made out of galvanized sheet metal, pop riveting the hood to the tractor’s frame. Then he converted a 60-gal. air compressor tank into a grill and mounted it on top of the hood. A propane bottle mounts on back of the tractor and is attached by a 3/8-in. dia. hose to the grill. He cut a hinged door into the compressor tank and added an exhaust stack on top that he made out of galvanized sheet metal. The tractor’s Berglass hood was covered by a bolt-on flappper plate, which is used to adjust the grill’s air intake. The tractor’s 60-gal. air compressor tank mounts on the tractor’s hood.

There’s storage space under the hood. Access is provided by removing a pin on front and pulling down a hinged door. “I use the space to store lighter fluid, tongs, wood chips, and various other grill items,” says Thomas. A 4-ft. long, 18-in. wide oak shelf attaches on front of the tank to an angle iron frame that bolts onto the tractor’s hood. I built it because I wanted something a little bigger than the gas and charcoal grills I already had,” says Thomas. “I also use coals with it. For example, when cooking Boston butts I start by using coals for 10 to 11 hours and then when the coals start to die down I switch over to the gas burner. I’ve had a lot of offers to buy it but it’s not for sale.

“IT keep the grill in my barn, when but when I have friends over for a cookout I fire up the tractor and drive closer to my house where I can watch it better. The only limitation is that it’s hard to see over the big 60-gal. tank. I have to look around the sides of it to see anything in front of me that’s less than 5 ft. tall.”

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