

Canadian Artist Creates Horsehair Mementos

When Donna Murray creates a horsehair memento, it's very personal. She knows something about the horse, which is usually dead, and the client, who sent her the hair to create a keepsake. Two large binders of horse/owner stories and photos share space in her work shop with bags of carefully labeled horsehair.

Horses have always been part of the Lethbridge, Alberta, artist's life - from growing up on a Saskatchewan cattle and grain farm, to working as a farrier. Time didn't allow Murray to pursue her interest to be a horsehair artist until she was injured in an accident in 1989. With the help of videos and books by hitchers Shoni and Ron Maudling (www.hitchedhorsehair.com), she taught herself to braid and hitch horsehair.

Many artists offer braided horsehair jewelry, Murray says. Fewer offer hitched horsehair, as it's more difficult and time consuming.

"Hitching is done over a wooden

dowel. It's a little like brick laying, one row interlocks with another - open hitching and then close hitching around strings. It's lots of counting, like cross stitch," Murray explains. Hitching allows the artist to create geometric patterns and letters/brands.

All horsehair work begins by washing the hair and then creating "pulls" - 6 to 12 hairs evenly twisted together.

Murray prefers hairs from the tail, because they are longer and stronger. But since it's an emotional thing for customers to send hair from a horse that has died, some can only bear to take a snip of hair from the mane.

"Key chains and zipper pulls are very popular and last a long time," she notes. "I make a lot of hat bands."

After doing trade shows for 15 years, Murray's hobby has become a full-time business. She is currently about five months behind on orders.

"What I do takes time. I'm very particular and don't want to disappoint people. I appreciate that customers are willing to wait



Canadian artist Donna Murray creates a variety of horsehair mementos, including bracelets and hatbands (above) and various pieces of jewelry.



for the pieces," Murray says.

By collaborating with other local artists who work with leather, wood and silver, she can incorporate horsehair designs into bridles, belts, blankets and jewelry. Recently she worked with a wood carver to create 2 Spirit Horse Sticks for an Arizona client.

Besides horsehair, Murray also creates wool blankets and other useful items by hand-latching wool on burlap.

"Because there is such a variety, it never



really gets dull for me," she says of her artistic business.

Murray's website includes details about how to harvest and ship hair.

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Specially designed spring clip is used as a fastener for 1/2-in. metal conduit, allowing you to put up greenhouses and storage sheds without using tools.

Spring Clip Helps Build "Tool-Free" Structures

"It's like building with an erector set," says Wez Ligon about her patent-pending spring clip that makes it possible to put up greenhouses or storage sheds with 1/2-in. metal conduit without using tools.

Her initial use for the clip was to create trellises and low tunnels for gardening. It soon became apparent that the spring clip can be used to create all types of structures as well as for everyday use around the house.

Simply squeeze the ends of the metal clip to slip in pieces of conduit; then release. The tension of the spring tightly holds the conduit in place.

The Almont, Mich., hay farmer got the idea while looking for ways to market hay that had been rained on.

"I found the solution in hay bale gardening and I've been teaching the technique for several years," she says. With no weeding and very little labor, it's ideal for people who physically can't do traditional gardening.

To improve hay bale gardens, Ligon wanted to add trellises for tall and climbing vegetable plants and low tunnels to extend the season. That was the impetus for developing the spring clip to connect pieces of conduit to build frames.

"Not only does the clip act as a fastener,

it acts as a hinge as well. It's great for building foldable structures that can tip up and have scissor doors," Ligon says.

The structures run the gamut from a mobile chicken pen to a covered dog run to a school bus shelter for children. The clips can also be used for hanging plastic tubing or holding wire reinforcement in place when pouring cement.

For FARM SHOW readers, Ligon is offering a special deal - 25 spring clips for \$50 with 5 free wire tools to hold the clip open during assembly. Larger orders are discounted (50 clips/10 tools for \$90, and 100 clips/20 tools for \$175). Shipping is free in the continental U.S.

Ligon also sells wholesale and invites horticulture businesses, farm supply stores and other entrepreneurs to contact her.

She has created plans for several projects including a hangar for a grow light, a garden arch, and a low tunnel, which she plans to share on an open forum.

In the future, she plans to manufacture larger metal clips for bigger diameter tubing. Check out a video of the clips in use at www.farmshow.com.

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Clip was originally designed to create trellises and low tunnels for gardening, but can also be used to make other types of structures.



To use the clip you squeeze both ends and slip in pieces of conduit, and then release (left). Spring tension holds conduit tightly in place.



To measure field size, Hoffman paints a yellow stripe on tire.

Easy Way To Measure Field Size

Ben Hoffman of Bradford, Maine recently sent FARM SHOW photos of this idea: "To measure the size of my fields, I measured the circumference of my tractor tire (104 in.) and then painted a bright yellow stripe behind one of the lugs. As I drive across the field, I count the number of tire revolutions, then multiply

the number of revolutions by 104 and divide by 12 to get the distance in feet."

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