He Built His Own Asparagus Harvester

Stewart Holliday’s modified, zero-turn lawn mower makes it easy to pick stalks from his asparagus field. It eliminates the need to bend to pick spears from his nearly 40,000 plants.

“I started with a Dixon zero-turn and used 2 by 3-in. steel tubing to extend the frame,” he says. “The longer frame let me move the seat forward and down and adjust the pitch. I bought new cables that let me reposition the foot pedals and controls as well.”

Holliday framed in supports for a basket to the side of the operator’s seat, as well as another one above the rear. He later added a swivel from a boat seat so the operator can turn to drop the asparagus into the side basket.

“I learned after the fact that I needed the swivel,” says Holliday. “The seat can be adjusted up and down or back and forth to match the operator’s legs. The pitch was the big thing, to get the operator as close to the ground as possible with minimal bending.”

Holliday says the picker works great, whether using a knife or just breaking the asparagus off. He drives over the row with wheels to either side.

Holliday lives in Arizona most of the year, but has developed other practices to make it easier to grow and harvest the asparagus on his Wisconsin farm. Each spring he applies chicken manure and lime to keep it at the preferred 7 to 7.2 pH range. He prefers to burn the entire row. He will burn this spring before fall, but this past fall the asparagus remained green too late. He will burn the entire row.

“The asparagus really likes what we are doing,” says Holliday. “Last spring it grew so fast I was picking twice a day from the end of May through the first part of June.”

Holliday has since added a walk-in cooler he purchased used from a local school and is considering a refrigerated box truck.

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They’re Growing Coffee In Texas

Most coffee is made from beans harvested in South and Central America, Kenya, Sumatra, or Hawaii. Coffee plants like cool mountain slopes with slightly acidic and well-drained soil. They like a canopy of trees above them and fresh rain.

So why are researchers trying to grow coffee plants in a warm, dry southwestern Texas valley with poorly drained, alkaline clay soil, where they get watered with salty Rio Grande water? Dr. Juan Anciso, an Extension horticultural professor, can answer that question.

Dr. Anciso is growing many different coffee varieties from around the world in a small greenhouse. He hopes to have 150 different varieties in the greenhouse by the end of the year. He is growing coffee from locations all over the world, including Sumatra, Brazil, and Hawaii. Some of the varieties he is growing are robusta, liberica, and arabica.

Dr. Anciso is growing different coffee varieties from around the world in Texas, in order to gain a better understanding of diseases such as coffee rust. He is also growing different varieties of coffee to help farmers in Texas understand how to grow coffee in their region.

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