

# Leaf Blower-Vac Restored To “Like New” Condition

“It holds more than most commercial baggers for garden tractors, so I don’t have to empty it nearly as often. And it cost very little to build,” says Billy Gilbert, Apex, N.C., about the leaf blower-vacuum he rebuilt to fit his 1974 Sears lawn tractor.

“I paid \$50 for the tractor many years ago,” says Gilbert. “It didn’t have a hood or dash panel but it ran good. I found a hood and dash panel for it on Ebay. The mower was in great shape and still runs well. Over the years all I’ve replaced are the battery, a few belts, and a brake band.”

He got the Trac Vac leaf vac from a friend. “It was in really bad shape and looked nothing like it does today,” says Gilbert. “The box was rusted out, the bed was gone, and the Tecumseh engine smoked like a freight train. I worked in a machine shop at the time and was given some of the materials that I used to rebuild it.”

He rebuilt the impeller’s engine and

replaced the rusted-out flooring on the box with wood. He used 3-in. aluminum square tubing to make a new frame, adding slots to hold panels of rubber-coated wire mesh. He also replaced the 6-in. dia. poly hose with a new one. The flexible hose runs from the impeller to a hole cut into the front side of the box.

“The tractor’s engine began to blow smoke everywhere so I replaced it with a new Briggs & Stratton,” says Gilbert. “The box’s wire mesh has fairly large openings so I do lose tiny pieces of ground-up leaves, but that’s okay because they make good fertilizer for my yard and I can use them as mulch in landscaped areas. I open a door on back of the box and then pull the leaves out with a hard tooth rake.”

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Billy Gilbert rebuilt this leaf blower-vacuum to fit his 1974 Sears lawn tractor.

## He Built His Own Leaf Blower-Vac

James Nicholson, Lisbon, Ohio, has about 2 1/2 acres of lawn to maintain with a lot of maple trees. He wanted to use a blower to clean off the leaves but didn’t want to spend the money for one. So he used salvaged materials to build his own leaf blower-vacuum.

“It works great and makes fall cleanup much easier,” says Nicholson. “I patterned it after commercial models on the market and spent a total of less than \$50. My brother-in-law gave me the hose, which came off an old shop dust collector.

“I used to work as a heavy equipment mechanic at a Cat dealership, so I painted it Caterpillar yellow and black and added Cat decals.”

The engine, fan and impeller housing on the unit were originally part of a self-propelled, walk-behind blower-vac. The engine lacked compression due to a stuck valve, but Nicholson got it running again.

He made his own blower chute, using sheet metal and 1/4-in. thick plexiglass for the sides. “The plexiglass came off an old Cat excavator.” I used a bandsaw to cut the plexiglass to fit and pop riveted it onto the chute,” says Nicholson. “I like the plexiglass sides because I can see whenever the chute starts to plug up, which means the trailer is getting full.”

He made an aluminum box that measures 4 by 4 ft. and mounted it on a steel undercarriage, which rides on a widened MTD tractor front axle. A length of 7-in. dia. flexible poly hose runs from the impeller to the fan. The box has a single door on back of it, with a lever used to lock it.

Nicholson built the frame for the box out of an old pop-up tent camper. “The camper



Nicholson used salvaged materials to build his leaf blower-vacuum. Blower chute’s sides are made from 1/4-in. thick plexiglass, making it easy to see what’s going on.

had a lot of aluminum in it which results in a lightweight frame,” says Nicholson. “The box is hinged to the axle at 2 points. I use a latch to trip the box so that it dumps back.”

He used large sheets of 1/16-in. thick aluminum for the box’s sides. The frame that supports the rear door came off a snap-on pickup bed cover. Nicholson pop riveted aluminum sheeting onto both sides of it.

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Jig consists of a 1/2-in. thick steel plate welded at a 90-degree angle to a larger plate that’s big enough to bolt engine in place. Mower shaft protrudes through hole cut into center of plate.

## Simple Jig Straightens Bent Mower Shafts

Clifford Byer has put hundreds of lawn mowers back to work with his shaft-straightening jig. He built it to fix his own mower when he was a young man, but word got around. Now 80, he is still using the jig.

“Shafts are always getting bent hitting rocks or stumps,” he says. “Folks heard about my jig and started bringing their lawn mowers over.”

Luckily for his friends and neighbors, virtually every walk-behind mower uses a common bolt pattern for mounting motors. For well over 50 years, Byer’s single jig has done the job.

The jig consists of a smaller 1/2-in. steel plate welded at a 90-degree angle to a larger 1/2-in. steel plate. The large plate simply has to be big enough to bolt the engine in place. Byer drilled holes for the engine mount and cut out a large hole in the center for the shaft to protrude through. The edge of the plate is welded to two C-channels, creating a base to keep the plate vertical.

The smaller steel plate is welded in place across the hole, but off center by several inches. A hole drilled through this plate lines up with the top of the bent shaft. A nut welded to the shaft side of the plate houses a fine thread 1-in. bolt.

“You could use other size bolts, but the 1-in. one was handy,” says Byer.

He also attached an old wiper arm to the base plate so it could pivot against the shaft as it rotates to indicate the bend. However, he notes that simply turning the shaft against the straightening bolt also identifies the bend. “Just tighten the bolt down slowly, and it



“Shafts are always getting bent hitting rocks or stumps,” says Byer. “Folks heard about my straightening jig and started bringing their lawn mowers over.”

straightens the shaft out,” says Byer. “The jig has never failed, and I’ve never had a problem such as a cracked base or broken shaft.”

Byer advises draining the oil and removing the spark plug to make it easy to turn over the engine and rotate the shaft.

Eventually, he added a gusset to reinforce the small plate. Byer says it has been a handy jig to have around and cost him practically nothing.

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