

Heavy-Duty “Truck Box” Wagons

“Mounting old heavy-duty truck hoist boxes onto a pair of wagon running gears gives us the benefits of hauling all kinds of heavy material that an ordinary wagon can’t hold up to,” says Timm Johnson, Galesburg, Ill.

He and his brother Terry bought the 9-ft. long “contractor boxes”, which came with self-contained hydraulics, from a local municipality. The boxes still have the front headboard that originally went over the truck cab. They often pull 2 of the wagons at a time. The running gears were painted black and the wheels silver.

“The boxes on these trucks were starting to rust, so the city removed the boxes from the trucks and installed new stainless steel ones. However, other than a little rust the boxes are still in good shape,” says Timm. “We’ve used them to haul dirt and gravel, broken-up concrete from old corn crib foundations, large rocks, 12-ft. long tree trunks from an old shelter belt, and ground-up asphalt we used to build up our driveway. One time we hauled away 15 double wagon loads of black dirt for the city when they built a new park.”

They installed the boxes 2 years ago, after a 4-year search. “We had been using an old

wooden wagon, but the wood floor broke after concrete was dumped onto it,” says Johnson. “The floors on these boxes are made from 3/8-in. thick steel so they aren’t likely to break. We spent only about one third as much as we would have for comparable new pull-type wagons.”

The boxes are mounted on a pair of heavy-duty Deere 1065A wagon running gears they bought used. Each box came with a subframe that supported a scissor hoist. The Johnsons reinforced the subframe by cutting up the 6-in. sq. toolbar off an old 3-pt. rotary hoe and welding it onto the running gear and also to the hoist. “The front part of the subframe is independent of the running gear and the scissor hoist, which keeps the front end of the running gear from lifting up in the air as the hoist raises the wagon,” says Timm.

They use their Deere 7600 145 hp. tractor to pull doubled-up wagons, and a stripped down Deere 4020 to haul single wagons. “The stripped down 4020 only has one remote outlet so we added another one to unload both wagons,” says Timm.

U-bolts from the rotary hoe serve as mounting brackets to store hydraulic hoses



Timm and Terry Johnson mounted “contractor” truck boxes on heavy-duty Deere running gears. The low-profile boxes carry heavy loads of dirt, concrete, firewood, and other materials. Because of the way the hoist is attached to the subframe, the front end of running gears do not lift up when the boxes are dumped.



on front of both wagons.

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“It lets you gather all different sizes of nuts, by adding or removing detachable spacers between the pickup wheels,” says Matthew Coz about the new Cyclone Nut Rake.

“One Size Fits All” Nut Gatherer

“Our new Cyclone Nut Rake is designed to pick up nuts off the ground and dump them into the bin on front. It lets you gather all different types of nuts, from the smallest to the largest, just by adding or removing detachable spacers from between the pickup wheels,” says Matthew Coz, Woodland Power Products, West Haven, Ct.

“High-density polyethylene pickup wheels roll over the nuts and collect them, and a set of removing tines knocks them off into a removable bin for easy disposal.”

The nut rake is available as an 18-in. wide walk-behind model or a 36-in. wide tow-behind. Both models allow you to pick up any size nut, from acorns and hickory nuts up to black walnuts and sweet gum balls.

“The spacers are slightly smaller than the pickup wheels and serve only to increase or decrease the space between the wheels. With most other nut gatherers, you have to buy a separate machine to switch from very small to very large nuts, or vice versa,” says Coz.

To install the spacers, you pull a hinge pin from each end of the axle and slide the pickup wheels off. “It takes only about 10 min. to add or remove a set of spacers,” says Coz.

He notes that the tow-behind model can pick up nuts going forward or backward,

whereas other tow-behind models on the market can only be used going forward. “The removable bin lets you dump the nuts easily,” adds Coz.

The walk-behind Cyclone Nut Rake sells for less than \$650 including shipping; the tow-behind model for less than \$850 including shipping.

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Spacers are installed by pulling a hinge pin from each end of Cyclone Nut Rake axle and sliding pickup wheels off.

Barn Owls Rule In Sugar Cane Fields

By Dee Goerge, Contributing Editor

Florida’s 700,000-acre Everglades Agricultural Area has become an unlikely home for one of the densest populations of barn owls in the U.S. They’re attracted by hordes of rodents and the many cozy owl boxes that have been built by farmers for them to live in. More barn owls means less rodenticide and fewer rodents to damage sugar cane, rice and vegetable crops.

In the 1970’s, damage from rodents to sugar cane crops was assessed at \$30 million/year, says Dr. Richard Raid, professor of plant pathology, with the University of Florida Everglades Research and Education Center. As weather starts to cool in the fall, several species of rats and mice invade the fields and chew and damage the ripening cane. Rodenticides help, but they need to be reapplied and are very costly.

“I wouldn’t say owls can totally replace rodenticides, but growers can certainly reduce their management costs,” Raid says. A \$25 wooden owl box lasts for years and houses owl families capable of consuming 1,000 to 2,000 rodents a year.

The idea to use barn owls started in 1994 when Raid mentored a high school student for a science fair project. They set out boxes designed for barn owls and within a couple of months, barn owls started moving in.

“Now, owls often move in within a day when new boxes are put up along the edges of fields,” Raid says. “Sugar cane and barn owls are almost made for one another. Rodents are active at night, which coincides with owls. Barn owls are one of the most prolific raptors capable of hatching 4 to 7 chicks during each of Florida’s two nesting seasons, fall and spring. This also coincides with the cane harvest, which opens fields up for easy predation. Owlets can eat up to 1 1/2 times their weight per day, so an adult pair has to bring 20 to 24 rodents per night as chicks mature.

“Barn owls are desperate for nesting sites,” Raid adds, noting he once discovered owl chicks in a blue plastic barrel someone stuck on a post. However, wooden or fiberglass boxes have proven to work best to provide the dark, safe space barn owls seek.



Barn owls housed in plastic nesting boxes help Florida sugar cane growers control rodent populations.

Ideally, owl boxes are placed on the field edges with the hole facing north on 4 by 4 treated posts about 8 ft. off the ground. Distance between them varies. They are spaced about every quarter mile along a railroad track, for example. Many Florida barn owls leave during the heat of the summer, which is a good time for growers to clean and treat boxes with Permethrin to deter Africanized honeybees and blood-sucking insects.

Barn owl boxes are 3 ft. long, 1 ft. wide and 16 to 18 in. tall, with a 5 by 7-in. hole in an upper corner. Owls nest at the opposite end, using the owl pellets (regurgitated bits of eaten prey) as nesting material where they lay eggs and hatch their chicks.

Over the years Raid and volunteers have built and put up more than 500 boxes. Cooperative growers also purchase and install fiberglass boxes on their own.

“This is barn owl heaven. They love open land. The barn owl project is one of the best programs for the sugar cane industry and agriculture down here,” Raid says. “And we’ve educated thousands of kids and adults along the way.”

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