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Giant Flowers Made From Plastic Barrels

A central Illinois retired grain elevator worker is doing a booming business making colorful giant sunflowers out of old 55-gal. plastic barrels. Each sunflower measures about 5 1/2 ft. in diameter.

"I can't make them fast enough," says Gary Smith, of Lovington. "It started off 4 years ago as just a challenge to see if I could do it. Now I have customers all over the U.S., and after making more than 500 sunflowers it has turned into a great hobby," he says.

Smith makes and paints the sunflowers at his farm and sells them out of a shop just down the road. It takes about 1 1/2 hrs. to make one sunflower. "I try to make four or five a day," he says.

He sometimes travels up to a couple hundred miles to get the barrels. "Most of them have been used for food grade materials," he says.

It took him 3 weeks to make a design pattern he uses to cut the barrel up into heart-shaped sections, which form the petals. He uses a sawzall and jig saw to cut the barrel into 8 petals - 4 out of the top half of the barrel and 4 out of the bottom. "I rotate the barrel 1/8 of a turn and bolt the two halves together so they interlock. The barrel's bottom forms

the center of the sunflower. I also drill a hole through it for the customer to attach the sunflower to a post or wall," says Smith.

He then paints the petals according to the customer's wishes, sometimes adding polka dots to the center of the sunflower and often accenting the petal tips with a different color.

He says some of the most popular requests have been color schemes focused around popular professional sports teams and universities. They feature the team or school's logo in the center. "Coming from a farm background, I'm also able to include tractor logos upon request," says Smith.

Smith sells standard sunflowers for \$65; \$80 with an 8-ft. long, 4 by 4 wooden post. He will deliver locally.

Smith says he went through cancer treatments a couple years ago, and during his treatments he was very weak. "Several customers and friends spent evenings helping me stay caught up with my orders. It just goes to show how small towns come together when someone needs help," he says.

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Truck Grille Headstone Memorializes Trucker

After Ron Pethick's cousin Greg died last May, Ron knew it would take some time before a headstone could be delivered. He wanted to do something in the interim. He had been very close to his cousin, who was only 55 when he died of a heart attack.

Pethick found a good photo of his cousin taken at a Louisville truck show and took it to a business that printed the photo and text on a piece of 20 by 20-in. aluminum. But he was stuck about what to mount it on until one night when he woke up with the perfect idea.

"We're from a trucking family. Greg started trucking when he was 18," Pethick says. "I decided to use an old Peterbilt grille as a temporary headstone."

He checked with the cemetery manager and found out he could use it as long as the marker wasn't oversized or gaudy. With the help of friends, it took about a day and a half to remove the screen, cut down the height and width of the grill, polish it up, and bolt it back together to create a backdrop appropriate for the photo. A professional welder attached the photo and joined the middle seam, which is hidden by a Peterbilt logo and a swan hood ornament. The back is green-treated wood painted silver.

"I'm happy we did this," Pethick says, noting that the permanent headstone won't be placed until sometime this year. The Peterbilt



Pethick had a photo of his deceased trucker cousin printed on an aluminum sheet, then mounted it on a cut-down Peterbilt grille as a temporary headstone.

monument held up well through the summer, fall and winter. When it's replaced, Pethick plans to give the Peterbilt monument to his uncle.

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Randy Hess and his father, Ray, collect and restore Fimaco garden tractors. Introduced in 1954, Fimacos were small and very basic.

They Collect And Restore Rare Garden Tractors

It's small and not that impressive in design as lawn tractors go, but Randy Hess and his father, Ray Hess, proudly collect and restore Fimaco garden tractors. It's part of their local history as the tractors were manufactured nearby in Lancaster, Penn., in the 1950s by a division of Fidelity Electric Company.

Literature promoting the Fimaco when it was introduced in 1954 cites it as "215 pounds of power! It reverses! It pulls up to 10 times its own weight! It's the ideal lawn tractor you've always wanted!"

At just 52 1/2 in. long, 27 in. wide and 34 in. tall, it was small compared to other tractors at the time and very basic, Randy says.

In 2002, when he was 11, he helped his dad restore the first one in their collection. Now, they have several of them, as well as two Mity-Mule tractors, slightly revised versions of the Fimaco after the company was purchased in 1957.

"Me and my little sister played with it a lot," Hess recalls of the first tractor. The Hess family continues to ride and work with tractors in their collection on their Willow Street, Penn., property. They use them to haul carts and pull gang mowers, one of the many accessories Fimaco used with its tractors.

Hess, an auto technician, and his dad have the skills to fix up the 2 1/2 hp., 4-cycle Briggs and Stratton air-cooled engine,

though finding the right ignition coil can be a challenge.

"They are very simple, just a chain drive, similar to a pedal tractor and an angle iron frame. All the seats are 13-5 hole tractor seats," Hess says.

The arched hood and mesh grill are "odd" he notes, making the hood look like a mailbox. A toolbox came standard on back of the mower. While it seems like a good idea, the lid can't be fully opened without hitting the seat, so the toolboxes got pretty dented.

Hess does the body work and painting. Based on paint on the better preserved tractors, Regal red and Hazard yellow are the closest matches he could find.

Despite the Fimaco tractor's flaws and simplicity, the Hesses are proud to have what is believed to be the largest collection of them. It fits in with the several other oddball lawn and garden tractors they collect and restore.

The Hess family uses some of the tractors in their yard, have some displayed inside, and take a few to area shows and fairs. During 2020 they restored eight tractors including a Fimaco tractor.

Hess invites anyone with information or questions about Fimaco or Mity-Mule tractors to contact him by phone.

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Cowboy Boot Loops Game

"It's not as easy as it looks, and it's addictive," says FARM SHOW reader Steve Peterman about the Cowboy Boot Loops Game he invented and now makes for fun.

"The general idea is not mine," he emphasizes, noting he saw an old, plain version of the game outside a Custer, S. Dak., restaurant and decided to add character with Western art and give the game a name.

He's made them for family, friends and for a local Colorado restaurant, all with different colorful backgrounds he paints. They include something ranchers have plenty of - old cowboy boots.

The painted back boards set up like an easel and have hinges to fold up to store when not in use. Peterman cuts 2 by 4s the height of the boot and screws it to the back board, before screwing the boot on the 2 by 4 near the heel. He uses 5 or 6 boots on each game and randomly paints numbers on the heel of each boot. The 7 to 8-in. dia. loops are made of 3/4-in. sisal rope, with ends secured with surgical tubing or industrial, weather-proof tape.

Players stand about 6 ft. from the board and take turns throwing 6 rings. While that sounds easy because of the short distance, it's actually pretty tricky, Peterman says.

Players toss the ropes either horseshoe or frisbee-style. There are no real rules to the game. Points can be added per person or by adding the totals of team members.



Cowboy boots are screwed to a painted back board, and players take turns throwing rope rings over the boots.

Playing Cowboy Boot Loops is just a lot of fun and great anytime friends get together, Peterman says. DIY FARM SHOW readers shouldn't have any problem making versions of their own.

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