



ASK ALBERT!

Albert Roberts, Pine Stump Farms, Omak

Try Your Hand at Making Your Own Tools

Dear Albert,

I was inspired by the topic you addressed in a recent column, from someone who was building their own strip tillage rotovator. I'm not quite there in terms of skill set, but I am interested in custom and resourceful farming tools. Do you have any recommendations for smaller machines or tools that I might tackle making for my farm?

- Tool-Maker Wannabe

Dear Wannabe,

I like the way you think! Starting small and being realistic about your abilities is a great way to build on your skill set. We love to innovate with the materials we have on hand, and can give new life to.

And funny you should ask about DIY tools. We recently viewed an intriguing tutorial created by USDA-Agriculture Research Service staff Dr. Eric Brennan. Eric walks viewers through an eight-minute how-to to make your own inexpensive hoe, the "recycle strap hoe" Eric demonstrates how the recycle strap hoe is easily made from materials around you: poles, old bicycle inner tubes, and discarded steel strapping. The hoe is also easily customizable to the user's height, which can make a big difference for a person's back and body. The video can be accessed at tinyurl.com/jz434ch.

Looking at the You Tube of the hula hoe, several thoughts occur to me. First of all, it is always great to innovate something out of otherwise unused materials and those banding straps have a lot of strength and spring to them. In our neck of the woods, we don't come by bamboo poles very often, so I'd look for an old broom or mop handle or use some pvc pipe. That design is

nice if the soil is light and loamy or sandy. If the soil is heavier or with lots of clay in it, then that particular tool might not be sturdy enough to withstand the battering.

There are several sites where you can find more homemade tool designs. Josh Volk (joshvolk.com) is very creative, and describes the best DIY designs for small scale farm tools as "straightforward to build, with mostly common, inexpensive or salvageable parts and without the need for overly special tools." That's a pretty perfect summary of what you are aiming for. Josh has plans for carts made from old bicycle wheels and a lightweight metal frame that are excellent. Allen Doug has a plan for converting a chipper/shredder into a bean thresher. Also motherearthnews.com and homesteadingtoday.com have ideas from time to time.



Photo credit: Carey Hunter

Innovation and a smart use of resources can create handy and efficient tools for the farm. This "tired tire" found new life in Cuba as a wheelbarrow.

I'd say that the main idea to keep in mind is "What needs to be done?" looking at the theoretical physics. *What is the task and what is the physical motion needed to accomplish that?* When one keeps that framework in mind, then the possibilities fall in line.

One of our favorites is from when we toured Cuba, where for decades there was a scarcity of materials. Someone had taken an old tire and turned it into the bed of a wheelbarrow.

May the resource(s) be with you,

Albert

Albert Roberts was raised on a fourth-generation grain and cattle operation in North Dakota. Albert has ranched in the Okanogan for twenty-eight years with his partner Carey Hunter. He is keeping busy cutting carbonized pine trees as a result of last summer's wildfires. albert_roberts@hotmail.com

A NEW ALBERT?

Albert is signing off and invites you to take a turn at answering this column! Surely there are many out there with lots of experience and expertise. Thanks for the faithful and interested readership. Email editor@tilthproducers.org to put your name in the Ask Albert Q&A hat.

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