



Photo courtesy Jessica Miller, Waterloo Courier

This modified Hesston Hay Stacker is used to pick up leaves in Grundy Center, Iowa.

Leaf Stacker Stretches City Budget

When Grundy Center, Iowa, public works director Jim Copeman heard about a better way to pick up leaves in the fall, he jumped on it. He saved labor and the city saved money. And it was all thanks to a neighboring city employee.

"Larry Schmidt at Manchester, Iowa, came up with the idea of using Hesston Hay Stackers to pick up leaves," says Copeman. "Bob Greany in our shop made the modifications."

Hesston discontinued making Hay Stackers in 1976, but there are still a lot of them around

and they may find new life if the leaf idea catches on.

Before switching to the Hay Stacker, residents would sweep leaves into the street and Copeman's 4 to 5-man crews would go out with a garbage truck equipped with a chute on back. A skid steer would pick up the leaves.

"It would take a week to cover the town, and by the second day, leaves would be blowing around," says Copeman. "Now I just send Bob Greany around with the stacker. If we have a heavy leaf fall, he can fill the stacker in an hour."

It was Greany who came up with the modifications for the stacker. The beaters intended to rake up hay before blowing it into the wagon create a natural suction to move leaves into the blower. They also help break up the dried leaves for better compaction.

Greany added wings to the pickup reel made from flat, rigid plastic. Garage door springs attached to the wings allow them to flex if the driver gets too close to the curb.

As originally designed, the hitch on the stacker would push piles of leaves down the street when larger piles were encountered. Greany went to a 3-pt. hook-up, which provides for up to 18 in. of clearance.

"This way, the mouth of the stacker is a lot bigger," says Copeman. "The leaves just slide in."

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Straw beds make for clean potatoes and a much easier harvest, say Lou Brown and her husband, Chet, who plant their potatoes into a foot-thick layer of straw.

Straw Beds Produce Clean Potatoes

Straw beds make for clean potatoes and a much easier harvest, according to Betty Lou Brown, Wolfville, Nova Scotia.

When you live on top of a mountain, snow is common in May and frost can still visit in mid June so you have to baby your vegetable garden, she says. That's one reason Brown and her husband Chet plant their potatoes into a deep bed of straw. The idea has paid off.

"We planted a bushel of seed potatoes in a 30 by 60-ft. area and gathered 13 bushels back in the fall," says Brown. "They were beautiful potatoes, nice and clean and no scab at all. Sweet potatoes did very well, too. We just spread them out, cured them and they lasted into February."

A big advantage of straw is that not all the potatoes have to be harvested at the same time. Early in the season, she and her husband simply push the straw aside and pluck out the largest potatoes. The small ones are left to continue growing once the straw is pushed back.

Brown lays down the seed potatoes in rows 3 feet apart and at 18-in. spacings in the row. She then covers the potatoes with a foot thick layer of straw.

Once the potatoes are harvested, the straw is placed on winter crops like parsnips.

Straw isn't the only tool in Brown's gardening arsenal. Thanks to a friend who works at an area web-fabric manufacturing plant, she is able to get reject web fabric. Usually used in printing plants, the plastic material makes perfect fence material around gardens, fruit trees and other plants. The material creates a windbreak against drying summer winds while creating a warmer microclimate than surrounding hillsides would produce.

"The ground warms up quicker, and wildlife can't get at it; it's too slick and strong," says Brown. "Even porcupines can't climb it."

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They "plant" seed potatoes in rows 3 ft. apart, spaced 18 in. in the row.



Potatoes come up "nice and clean with no scab at all," say the Browns.

Family's Christmas Tree Never Dies

Instead of going out and cutting down a Christmas tree, Loran and Annette Bokenfohr of Busby, Alberta started a tradition several years ago of digging up a 6 to 7-ft. spruce tree on their farm in early November, before the ground freezes. They also dig up a 2 to 3-ft. tree for each of their five children.

They bring the trees into the house in pots, and decorate the trees like you would any Christmas tree. The small trees sit around the base of the big tree.

The kids each decorate their own tree and take care of them. It's very seldom that any of the trees die, and the family decorates them for Easter as well.

When spring comes, they plant the trees around the perimeter of their farmyard. Their goal is to have an evergreen shelterbelt that brings back the memory of Christmas whenever they look at it. The whole family takes the trip to the pasture to search for just the right trees in the fall, and the weather is much milder and more pleasant than it would be in December if they were going out to cut a tree.

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Loran and Annette Bokenfohr dig up spruce trees on their Alberta farm in early November, before the ground freezes, and bring the trees into the house in pots. They decorate the trees like you would any Christmas tree.

