



Boeckmann's curtain system cost about \$1,100. A used solar unit cost \$1,000. They keep his 26 by 96-ft. hoop-type greenhouse warm in winter.

Sun Powers Greenhouse Two Ways

You could say that every greenhouse is solar-powered, but Bryan Boeckmann puts the sun to use twice in his home-built building. Boeckmann, a fulltime fireman and part time flower grower, needed a way to release excess heat during day when he was at work. His 26 by 96-ft. hoop-type greenhouse was perfect for thermostatically-controlled, moveable side curtains like those used in poultry and hog buildings.

All he needed was electricity at the two-acre site. Because it was zoned commercial, the local utility told him they needed \$1,500 to hook up his greenhouse and a \$200 a month fee. He said, "No, thanks!"

For one thing, he didn't need the curtains or the power from May through mid September. For another, power lines passed right over the site, and saying no was a matter of principle. He went solar instead.

"The curtain system was about \$1,100, including the curtain, cables, insulation, machine and a thermostat," says Boeckmann. "The used solar unit, including the building it sits in, collector and batteries, cost me about \$1,000. My supplier gave me a good deal because it was the first system like it he had installed."

The greenhouse and curtain system allow Boeckmann to plant perennials in the cold frame at the end of September. By the end of February, the greenhouse soils are warming up and the perennials make a good comeback, producing flowers at least two months earlier than they would in the

field. Once a crop is finished, he tears them out and replants, a process he will try to repeat before temperatures fall again.

"The problem is that here in Missouri, it gets warm so quickly," says Boeckmann. Before installing his solar powered curtains, the air in the greenhouse could get too hot during the day, yet fall below freezing at night. With his new system, the curtains rise and fall to keep the temperature at a safe level.

"The curtain moves the most when the sun is out and charging the batteries," says Boeckmann. "When the weather is cold and cloudy and the system isn't charging, the curtains stay up so we don't need the energy."

Although installing the solar power system wasn't difficult and only took about a day, Boeckmann says vendor expertise is vital. "The system has to be sized just right for load capacity," he says. "It also needs to be oriented just right to catch most of the sun."

While he suspects any experienced electrician could install one, Boeckmann recommends getting an experienced supplier who understands component quality.

"I highly recommend my supplier," says Boeckmann. "The system works great. The only thing I've had to do is add water to the batteries. When they wear out, the next set will be gel batteries with a life expectancy of 10 to 15 years and no maintenance."

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Grow Your Own Business With Plants

Looking for a profitable sideline? Don't look beyond your back porch, back yard or "back 40", suggests Craig Wallin, author of several start-up guides to running profitable plant businesses. Whether flowers or mushrooms, ginseng or Christmas trees, grasses or roses, Wallin says there are plenty of opportunities if you know where to start.

"The hardest thing for most people is finding the information they need to get going," says Wallin. "There is some information at university extension offices, but it's often outdated or too academic."

He suggests starting with something you are already interested in and gather as much information as possible. To gather information for his *Start-Up Guides* and their periodic updating, he talks to people who are operating successful and profitable plant businesses. In each guide he gives examples, such as a rose grower who sells 3,000 plants a year at \$12 each, all out of her backyard. In *Greenhouse Plans*, two

greenhouse owners describe how they out-compete Wal-Mart by doing a superior job producing potted plants from seed. In *Profitable Culinary Herbs*, one grower describes how her part-time business became full-time and how she and her husband grow five acres of herbs with only the aid of an old Troy-Bilt Tiller.

Over a 20-year process of studying and writing about plant-based businesses, a couple of common factors stand out in Wallin's mind.

"I have noticed that women seem more successful at turning a hobby into a profitable business," says Wallin.

The second thing he has noticed is that growing plants for landscaping is one of the most dependable revenue sources. He credits the fact that they are not perishable, so if not sold today, they can still be sold tomorrow. They are also less likely to be subject to consumer whims or fads.

"The main thing is to start now and don't put it off," says Wallin. "The second thing is

Metal Art Business A Tribute To Lost Son

Though he's in his retirement years, Don Golden has made a fulltime business of "metal art" since 1996. He continues to be very busy filling orders across the country for "authentic, hand-torched items with a personal touch."

"Golden Metal Art" came about as a sort of tribute to a son Golden lost in a hunting accident.

"He had an amazing talent for metal work," he explains. "That's what inspired me, and by doing metal art myself, it helped me deal with my grief because I thought of my son every time I worked on something. It was therapeutic."

Golden makes almost anything that can be made out of metal: wall signs, gate entrance signs, ranch ornaments, security fence, decorative railings, coat and hat racks, pickup headache racks, head board inserts for log beds, ornamental weathervanes, fireplace sets, paper towel holders, rodeo trophies, bookends, lamps, bar stools, and custom art in general.

All of his work is hand done and he sells both retail and wholesale.

Most metal art these days is done with computers, according to Golden.

"Mine is not quite as perfect as the computer-generated work, but it's not far behind," Golden says. "My creations are true originals. They're all hand-cut with a plasma cutter."

An extensive catalog of patterns and products provides a great degree of flexibility, since many of the designs can be mixed and matched to fit different applications.

Most of the items are silhouettes done on 1/8-in. (or thicker) sheet metal, although Golden has also done two and three-dimensional projects.

"I really enjoy doing gate entrance signs for ranches. I've done various western scenes with horses and cattle, or wildlife scenes," he explains. "I once did 103 feet of deck railing that went around most of the house, along with stair railing and a gate for a home in Washington. I've also done a lot of security fence made out of square tubing."

Large metal entrance signs crafted by Golden, grace the cities of Salmon, Idaho and Clifton, Texas.

Silhouetted signs also look extremely sharp when mounted on the flat face of a large rock, as might be used in landscaping at the entrance to a yard.

Golden has also made smaller welcome signs out of old 18 to 20-in. plow disc blades. He sells those for \$45 each (plus S&H).

He gets a lot of orders for pickup truck headache racks and headboard inserts for log beds from Idaho and Montana. These 5 by 2-ft. pieces of art sell for \$270 (plus S&H).

to start small. There's always a learning curve with any new venture, and if the lessons learned are not so expensive, it's easier to go on to bigger and better things."

Wallin's *Start-Up Guides* cover how to grow and market a crop, how to decide on the best plants for you, how to sell all you can grow, how to make value-added products from plants for more income, how to get professional help, and how to tap hard-to-find wholesale sources for seeds and plants. Each guide also includes an informational resource section listing specialized newsletters, books and sources for commercial growing supplies.

Most of Wallin's 10 booklets sell for \$9.95 with the exception of *Greenhouse Plans* at



This praying cowboy is popular with customers.



Most of Golden's silhouettes are done on 1/8-in. or thicker sheet metal.



Welcome signs are made out of old 18 to 20-in. disc blades. They sell for \$45 apiece plus S&H.

Another unique item he makes is a 30-in. dia. "family tree" to hang on the wall. By putting a magnet behind individual pictures of family members, you can place them wherever you want on the tree, according to Golden.

His most popular products include various sizes of a cowboy with his horse, praying beneath a cross, 3-D Texas stars, welcome signs and gate signs.

"I will also custom design ornaments, either by doing my own drawings, or using customers' drawings or concepts," he says. "Custom items make great gifts or keepsakes."

It's important that inquiries include the size requested and a phone number, he points out. Dealer inquiries welcome.

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\$14.95 and *Hydroponic Gardening* at \$19.95. He is in the process of assembling all ten specialty books for sale in an electronic or e-book format, priced at \$27.

"Electronic publishing eliminates the cost of printing and mailing," explains Wallin concerning the low price. "It will be called *Profitable Plants*."

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