

Bears Made From The Forest Floor

Richard Carpenter and his wife, April, make their living from the land, using elk antlers to make jewelry, buttons and sculptures. Craft show customers often asked them for a bear sculpture but Carpenter resisted because “everybody makes bears.”

He finally said he’d do it if he could find a new material to work with. After three months he almost gave up on the idea. Then he started to rake the pine needles in his yard.

“An idea clicked in my mind that I could use them with a wire frame,” Carpenter recalls. “I put a sheet on the living room floor, dumped the needles on it, and asked my wife to help sort them out.”

April - to say the least - was dubious, but she helped pick out the unbroken, straight Ponderosa pine needles and put them in bundles.

Carpenter shaped a wire frame, then washed and softened the bundles of needles and started weaving.

“I figured out my own style of weaving,” Carpenter says. “The whole thing was an experiment. And I wasn’t sure if it would turn out.”

Three months later he had his first bear cub. That was in 1996. Since then Car-

penter has completed his third bear in 2000 in honor of April. Mountain Magic — A New Life, is the lifelike bear on all fours that has become so popular in emails. Altogether Carpenter completed five cubs and two large bears, refining his technique and adding details. “The pine needles seem to lend a nice shaggy hair look to the bears,” Carpenter says. He breaks some of the pine needles - which are 6 in. or longer - to create details. The tuft end on the needle adds texture for the ears, for example.

He carves the nose, eyes and claws out of wood and coats each sculpture with polyurethane to keep it supple. The bears don’t weigh much. The large bear fits in a 4 by 6-ft. glass case and only weighs about 40 lbs.

A large bear takes about 8 months and more than 200,000 pine needles. Because of the time involved and the originality, Carpenter sells the bears for an astounding \$60,000. The smaller bears are much less.

He also stays busy making jewelry and sculptures out of elk antlers that he sells at his shop and on the internet.

Carpenter is open to commission proposals, but he isn’t fond of doing the same sculpture over and over.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup (www.mountainmagicoriginals.com).



Carpenter uses Ponderosa pine needles to make one-of-a-kind bear sculptures.



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Farm-Sized Cheese-Making Equipment

Kusel Equipment is putting its 160 years of experience making professional grade cheese-making equipment to work for on-farm cheese makers with a new line of small scale cheese-making vats, presses and molds.

“We’ve covered all aspects of the cheese industry from large to extra-large, but in recent years we’ve seen a significant growth and interest in farmstead operations,” says Jim Szollar, vice president of marketing, Kusel. “We’ve also seen that these people have trouble finding the right sized equipment to meet industry standards.”

The small-scale equipment is made in Wisconsin with the same high quality stainless steel and other components used for large-scale plants. It is simply downsized and, where possible, simplified to match customer needs.

“We’re trying to supply everything needed so they don’t have to go to a local metal shop and try to fabricate something

that may not meet standards,” says Szollar.

Szollar points to the 50 to 100-gal. cheese vats the company offers as an example. The artisan vats are built to the same specifications with the same hot water heating and controls as a 5,000-gal. vat, but lack the automated agitators.

“Manual stirring is not a problem for a small cheese maker, and it keeps the cost of a 50-gal. vat under \$10,000,” says Szollar. “The press is air-powered with a 2 to 3 hp compressor that sells for \$2,500, while cheese molds can sell for anywhere from \$20 to \$300, depending on what the customer wants.”

A pasteurizer is the most expensive item, running up to \$25,000. Szollar says the cost is related to the automatic data capture equipment that is needed to satisfy state inspectors. He notes that temperature, timing and agitation information all has to be tracked. Even the air space between the unit cover and the milk has to be recorded.

Szollar strongly recommends that anyone



A new line of small scale cheese-making vats, presses and molds is available from Kusel Equipment. “Making cheese gives dairymen a chance to do more than just accept the price they get for milk,” says Jim Szollar, vice president of marketing.

thinking of making cheese for market contact the state dairy or sanitary inspector first. He also suggests taking part in university or industry sponsored seminars.

“If you’re thinking about getting into cheese making, a little research is money well spent,” says Szollar. “Making cheese gives dairymen a chance to do more than just accept the price they get for milk.”

Szollar points to the many successful farmstead cheese operations now in busi-

ness. “People who are really into artisan cheese are very passionate about it,” he says. “I think it’s like the California wine industry was 50 years ago. It just needed people to sell the product, and that’s what we have today with cheese.”

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Colorado Pizza Farm Keeps On Growing

The Pizza Farm near Wellington, Colo. is a half acre garden that tells the story of all the farm ingredients that go into a pizza. There are “slices” for wheat, dairy, swine, vegetables and herbs. The pizza plot is located at Harvest Farm, a rehab facility for 72 men who have struggled with addiction and homelessness.

“The Pizza Farm and our fall Harvest Farm Fest are two of our biggest attractions,” says Greta Walker, public relations, Harvest Farm. “We had between 15,000 and 20,000 visitors to the farm between September and October. The Pizza Farm is a really popular attraction for youth and children’s groups.”

Walker says the Pizza Farm and Harvest Farm Fest do more than just raise needed money for the program. They also provide work for the residents and a chance to be

in a positive communication role with the public.

“These men are here because they want to make positive changes in their lives and become self-sufficient, productive citizens,” says Walker. “The program gives them a positive work experience while learning new skills.”

Harvest Farm, like other parts of the Christian Outreach Denver Rescue Mission, reports an 85 percent success rate with graduates a year after completing the program. It has been so successful that Harvest Farm has recently expanded with a neighboring 100 acres being added, doubling its original size.

“We are working on building transitional housing for the new property, expanding to welcome more people to the farm,” says Walker. “We are really excited for the



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growth. When men go to Harvest Farm, they feel like it is a sanctuary away from the city and the temptations they fight. They are able to find peace and concentrate on recovery.”

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