

“No Nail” Garage Built With Cordwood

When Greg Van Winkle decided to build a garage, he had plenty of raw material to work with. His “hobby” is clearing his neighbors’ land of trees, mostly cedars.

“I bought a chainsaw to clear out some old fence lines, and pretty soon I was helping others,” explains Van Winkle.

With plenty of trees to work with, he bought a Logosol M7 sawmill to make his own lumber. His first project was an 18 by 18-ft. saltbox timber frame shed to house his sawmill out of the weather. Soon he was studying timber frame design and the use of cordwood walls.

“With the M7 I’m supposed to be able to cut logs up to 14 ft. long, but when you get over 10 ft. the blade starts to wander,” says Van Winkle. “As long as I keep my logs to 8 ft., I’m all right.”

Even if limited to less than 10-ft. logs, Van Winkle prefers the chainsaw sawmill with ripping chains to a bandsaw. He notes that while the kerf is larger, the chainsaw can handle surprises better like nails in the wood.

“I’ve cut through nails with my saw and not even known it,” he says. “A bandsaw would have been ripped up.”

Building the garage was easy, once he got started, he says. The first step was to lay an 18-in. wide rock foundation. Then he began the frame.

“My goal was to build it without a single nail,” he says. “I had never tried anything like it before.”

Once he had his timber frame up, Van Winkle filled in wall spaces with cordwood and a concrete mix that included sawdust. He credits Rob Roy, noted cordwood builder, for the mortar formula and tips on building. Van Winkle says he spent lots of time watching the builder’s videos and reading his books for ideas. He recommends Roy’s website (www.cordwoodmasonry.com) as a good resource.

“The sawdust provides needed moisture,” he explains. “Without it, the cordwood will absorb moisture from the mortar, and it will dry out too fast to cure properly.”

Van Winkle used 40 8 ft. 6 by 6-in. timbers



Greg Van Winkle built this garage using cordwood and a concrete mix that included sawdust.

for the frame and 13 cords of wood for the garage.

“I’m fixing to build a house with cordwood and timber frame,” he says. “I may start next

spring. I’ll use all cedar for that, too.”

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Backhoe Cutter Plates Saw Through Frost, Blacktop And Tree Limbs

Gibby Conn ran a backhoe for more than 50 years, and he was known for always being able to dig when others couldn’t. His secret was his patented backhoe cutter plates.

“I got the idea while trying to dig through frozen ground,” recalls Conn. “I made a prototype out of wood and took it to a metal shop. They had some old 1/2-in. bridge steel, and we made the plates out of it.”

The 2 by 2 1/2-ft. plates were large enough to extend beyond the joint of the backhoe arm and bucket. This allowed the teeth to cut when Conn turned the bucket on its back and dragged it across the surface. Saw teeth were cut from the edge of the blade, staggered like carpenter’s saw teeth, and hardened.

Conn could easily saw through frozen ground and pop out a bucket-size chunk with ease. Equally important, the plates didn’t interfere with regular use of the bucket.

The cutting plates also worked well on blacktop. Working a job for the Army Corps of Engineers, Conn once used the plates to cut through a 5-ft. thick bed of asphalt.

“I did five holes in three days,” he recalls.

“Another company used diamond saw blades, and it took them three weeks to dig three holes.”

The plates even helped with tree removal, making it safer and faster. “I could reach 28 ft. up into a tree with the bucket and saw off a limb. Unlike a chainsaw, it would come down gradually,” says Conn. “Once it had been topped, I would use the cutter plates to dig around the stump, slice off the roots and finally push it over.”

Conn was an independent operator with his own equipment. Although he had a patent, he never tried to sell the idea. Instead he told other operators to go ahead and copy it if they wanted.

“I used it on and off for more than 50 years,” he says. “The teeth would wear down, and I would just get them sharpened and rehardened.”

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Toothed cutter plates extend beyond joint of backhoe arm and bucket, allowing Conn to saw through frozen ground.

Corn Pics Document Growing Years

Pictures of ears of corn taken every year on July 31 offer a quick reminder to Dick Mercer and his son Steve of what kind of crop year it was. The simple record is fun to look at and emphasizes how different each year can be.

“In 1992, there was a volcano in the Philippines, and the ash sent into the atmosphere was blamed for the cool year worldwide,” recalls Mercer. “It really set the corn back. It was way behind maturing that year.”

The first year that photos were taken was 1986, a year when corn matured early. The corn was way ahead. Even though it was only the end of July, the kernels were filled and dented and the shucks were loose, says Mercer.

“We were sitting in the office having a cup of coffee and looking at a nearby field,” he recalls. “It looked ready to pick.”

He grabbed a Polaroid camera and took a picture of a couple of ears. That shot became the first of 23 years of corn pictures, and each tells a slightly different story. “We usually plant around the 14th of April every year,

so it’s either the maturity, the weather or a combination that makes the difference.”

It was another 21 years before a picture captured corn that matured that early. It was 2007, and the corn was fully dented on July 31 and being picked by the end of August.

This year the corn was still in the milk stage when the picture was taken. Dick’s son Steve has taken over the camera work and is maintaining the collection. He notes that while the planting date was about the same as other years, heat units weren’t the same, and it showed. “The cooler weather delayed maturity,” says Steve.

By harvest, the crop had caught up and then some. Dick reports some of the best yields the area has ever received. “We are seeing yields well over 200 bushels per acre with some neighbors reporting yields at or near 300 bushels.”

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