



Max Kaiser made a secure platform for pruning trees along field edges by mounting a home-built metal deck on back of his New Holland 4-WD articulated tractor.

## Tree-Pruning Deck Mounted On Back Of Tractor

A home-built 8 by 3-ft. metal deck, mounted on back of his New Holland TJ325 4-WD articulated tractor, provides a secure platform for pruning trees and performing other elevated work, says Max Kaiser of Napanee, Ontario.

"I use the deck mainly to cut tree limbs along field edges," says Kaiser. "My pole saw reaches out 10 to 12 ft., but that's not enough to get to some bigger limbs that can hit our tractors and combine. Working from a loader bucket can be unstable and dangerous.

"I came up with the idea one day when I was adjusting the lights on back of the tractor and noticed how high I was standing over the ground. I painted the add-on deck black to match the tractor's colors."

The deck is made from 1-in. decking welded to a frame made from 1 by 2 lightweight tubing and clamps over the bar that supports the tractor's rear "wide marker" lights. A vertical railing made from structural tubing is bolted on front of the deck. It provides a handhold and also serves as an attachment point for a harness lanyard.

"The deck is large enough for one person to work from, without being too wide when the tractor is in field use," says Kaiser. "The railing serves as a reference point while I'm



Add-on deck was painted black to match tractor's colors.

looking up when using the pole saw. I added a camera on back of the deck that looks down at the tractor's drawbar hitch pin, which was impossible to see before I added the deck. It hooks up to a monitor that I already had in the cab for another camera that mounts on my manure tank. If I ever find that the deck blocks my view I can quickly remove it by removing a few bolts."

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## He Specializes In Rare "Cucurbit" Seeds From Around The World

If you're looking for heirloom pumpkin, gourd or squash seeds, there's a good chance Mac Condill has them in his collection. Growing cucurbit crops is his family's business at their farm, The 200 Acres, in Arthur, Ill. The Condills grow more than 300 varieties for their Great Pumpkin Patch, bake some of them up for the Homestead Bakery, and sell nearly 200 varieties in their store and online.

"We carry some of the rarest squash varieties in the world," Condill says. His favorite is Tetsukabuto, a Japanese squash he talked about on a Martha Stewart television segment and included in decorations on the White House lawn.

But many of the varieties are old-time favorites that may be difficult to find, such as Moranga de Mesa, Hopi Cushaw and Survivor.

About 90 percent are heirlooms, so customers can replant the seeds and keep true to the variety if they are planted in isolation.

Condill has 30 to 40 isolation growers to ensure that varieties are at least 1/2 mile away from other cucurbits to avoid cross-pollination.

Fall is a busy time, gathering the harvest, scooping out the seeds and letting them air dry on racks for about a month. Condill labels the seeds and puts them in jars. Most seeds are good up to five years without germination loss.

To fill orders, he puts 15 to 18 seeds in amber bottles (\$5), which preserve the seeds and are pretty enough to be displayed. Having them seen to spark conversation is important to Condill.

"I'm not out there to sell to the mega farmer. I want to provide seeds to the enthusiasts, the small farmers, and to give people back the varieties they remember," he says. "With the internet people can search for a variety and land on our web page."

Homestead Seeds allows customers to search for varieties under several categories including country of origin, maturity and by use. Descriptions are concise and include details such as noting they were featured on Martha Stewart's TV show or that they are "Oh so pretty, but tastes like chalk" as seen



"We carry some of the rarest squash varieties in the world," says Max Condill, who sells rare seeds in amber bottles.



in the Casper white pumpkin description.

He ships seeds all over the U.S. and to other countries typically from December-April.

Condill also loves to promote cucurbits and their stories and traditions by decorating places such as the White House lawn and Chicago's Botanical Gardens.

And, he encourages people to keep seed and raise their own, even if it means they won't buy new seed from him every year.

"I'm OK with people keeping the seeds going. That's a win in my book," he says.

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## Simple Compactor Bales Up Used Plastic

Anybody with some wood and a front-end loader can bale up loose agricultural plastic Lynn Leavitt's way. The Ontario farmer compacts bale wrap, grain bags and other plastic with his "Pac-it" bale wrap compactor.

"I've considered selling the plans, but it's so simple that I can't patent it," says Leavitt, who sells Pac-its to farmers in his area.

The Pac-it consists of a wooden box with slats on the inside and a frame on the outside. It is open on both ends and sized to fit over a standard wooden shipping pallet. Leavitt uses a plunger attached to his front-end loader to compress plastic as it is added to the box. The plunger is simply a wooden pallet sized to fit inside the interior of the box.

Once the box is full of compacted plastic, the bale is tied off with the plunger pressing on it. Tie bands can be placed inside the box before the plastic is inserted. They also can be pulled over and under the completed bale with a rod Leavitt provides.

"Once the bale has been tied off, the operator slips two 2 by 4's through the slats of the box and over the plunger and lifts the box off the bale," explains Leavitt.

While many areas in the U.S. have no



Lynn Leavitt with his "Pac-it" bale wrap compactor. Plunger attached to front-end loader compresses plastic as it's added to wooden box. Tied-off plastic bale is shown at left.

market for used agricultural plastics, Canada does. Leavitt says the 900-lb. bales can be stored, transported and recycled. He and others using his compactors are selling their bales to Tri-County Plastics, a local recycler. Owner Doug LeBlanc estimates that clean,

used bale wrap has a value of 4 to 6 cents per pound.

Leavitt estimates having about \$400 in material costs for his compactor. He sells them for \$500 locally. He notes that orders from outside his local area would also include

shipping costs.

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