



Iowa farmer Russ Bruhn collects vintage Deere combines. In total, he and his son and son-in-law have a Deere 45, a 55, four 95's, and two 105's. The 45 is the smallest, equipped with just a 2-row cornhead. The other machines can be fitted with a windrow pickup, a grain platform or a cornhead, all of which Bruhn has on hand.

Vintage Deere Combines Still Harvesting Crops

Iowa farmer Russ Bruhn has an affinity for vintage Deere combines. It has grown into such a large hobby that it takes up space in several sheds on his farm. "I didn't acquire my first machine until the late 1980's, but since then I've added at least 5 other machines, and my son and son-in-law each have one, too. Once this hobby gets in your blood it sort of stays there," says Bruhn, who's been farming for 40 years.

Bruhn says his fixation on Deere combines began in the early 70's when he worked for a neighbor who raised a lot of cattle. "I spent many hours driving a model 105 with a 4-row, 40-in. head harvesting corn. The machine had a cab and a heater, so I was comfortable and out of the weather. I made up my mind right then I would own one someday."

In the late 1980's, when Bruhn was farming and working as a driver for Worthington Ag Parts, he bought his first 1969 Deere. "That 105 gas model came from Indiana and was in real good shape," says Bruhn. "The engine

ran well, the drive train was in working order, and all we did with the harvester was put in rasp bars on the cylinder and rebuild the clean grain elevator."

The next model he acquired was a 95 hillside model from Washington state. "That one was in mint condition, and we've kept it that way over the years. When it needs a chain, sprocket, belt or bearing, we make the repairs and keep it humming along," says Bruhn. He uses the machine to harvest about 30 acres of his own rye and oats every year and does some custom work for neighbors. "We can get parts for any of our machines from my son-in-law, who works for Deere, or Worthington has a lot of vintage machine parts, too," says Bruhn.

The open station 95 is fitted with a 16-ft. wide platform that cuts standing grain. Bruhn says sitting or standing in the open isn't a problem with dust because the seat and controls are high enough that dust blows to the side rather than up and over him.

Other models in Bruhn's mid-to-late 1960's stable of machines are a 105 diesel that came from a salvage yard and a 55 that his son bought at a farm auction. In total he and his son and son-in-law have a 45, a 55, four 95s, and two 105s. The 45 is the smallest, equipped with just a 2-row corn head. The other machines can be fitted with a windrow pickup, a grain platform or a corn head, all of which Bruhn has on hand.

"We bought a 95 rice crawler in Minnesota that had spent a lot of time in Louisiana, so it had a lot of rust from the salt spray," Bruhn says. "That one has taken a little time to get back into working order." Their other machines see regular harvest work every year and are always stored inside. Belts, chains, bearings and augers are checked every year and replaced as needed. Lubricants and filters are serviced every season. All their machines still have original tires that show plenty of use, but still handle their job.

Asked about using vintage machines to

harvest high-yielding crops, Bruhn is quick to point out "we just can't be in a hurry when we're running in corn that's well over 200 bu. an acre. These machines were built when a good corn yield was 100 bu. an acre." A few of the 50-year-old machines have grain tank extensions, but most still have their standard tanks which range from just 40 bushels on the 45 to about 100 bushels on the 105. Says Bruhn, "an auger on one of today's large Deere combines might hold as much as the tank on the 45." Bruhn says in addition to using the machines, they've hosted 3 tractor rides where the machines have all been displayed.

The Bruhn family operation also has two other Deere combines that they use for the majority of their 1,000 acres of cropland: a 9410 that harvests beans and a 9660 used for corn.

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Artist Uses Gourds As Her Canvas

"Gourds to me are like people. No two are alike, and there's no such thing as an ugly gourd," says Liduina Fedewa. "You can paint them with all types of paint, carve into them for a 3D effect, and even attach artificial clays. They are so forgiving; there's no blueprint."

She proves how versatile gourds can be with the artistic pieces she creates and sells at Michigan craft shows. And she enthusiastically educates gardeners who want to create something with gourds they have grown.

After gourds are finished growing in the fall, she stores them in her barn so that they aren't touching and turns them occasionally during the winter. Around March they are lighter in weight and dry seeds rattle inside. The gourds are ready to be cleaned. Fedewa likes to take them outside, place them in a large tub and thoroughly wash them with Dawn dish soap and a scrubby to remove the waxy surface.

Once dry they are ready to paint with everything from magic markers to oils, acrylics and even glitter paint. The last step is to seal with polyurethane. Or, they can be adorned with yarns and fibers. Fedewa often weaves colorful designs to fill in holes or imperfections on the gourd.

For Fedewa, who is also a woodcarver, gourds have become her favorite carving media. Gourds become bowls, vases, jewelry and catchall boxes.

She emphasizes safety when cutting into any gourd, because the dust is fine and often contains mold.

"Wear a mask or respirator, and use a dust

collector or fan. You don't want to inhale the dust," she warns.

To clean out a gourd's interior, she uses a cordless drill with a long shaft and a stainless steel scouring pad on the end to loosen up the fiber. After removing the fiber bits, she sands the inside smooth with a rotary tool.

The rotary tool, with a flexible head, is also what Fedewa uses to carve her designs. She starts by drawing a pattern on paper, making a stencil and then drawing it in pencil on the gourd.

One of her most complicated pieces is a carousel with colorful animals circling the gourd. She also makes flowers, butterflies and intricate lace patterns.

At craft shows, customers like the jewelry and catchall boxes that are lined and decorated with costume jewelry gems. The boxes can be customized with the customer's jewelry pieces to remember a loved one. Others ask Fedewa to carve a lace pattern from a wedding invitation to create a small box for a gift.

When gourds have naturally beautiful markings from the way they dried, she prefers to lightly stain or just seal them with polyurethane.

Besides selling at craft shows, Fedewa's Facebook page shows samples of her work, and she accepts requests for custom orders.

With her work, Fedewa hopes to inspire others to get creative.

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These are some of Michigan artist Liduina Fedewa's amazing creations. "There's no such thing as an ugly gourd," she says.



One of her most complicated pieces is a carousel with colorful animals circling the gourd.



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