

Artist Works With Walnut Shells, Peach Pits

Albert Tanko recalls the day in the mid-1980's when his wife took him to visit her grandmother in Wisconsin and he was mesmerized by a cross hanging on the kitchen wall made from walnut shells. "From that moment on, I was 'hooked' on the idea of transforming nuts into works of art," he says.

About 5 years ago, when Tanko was laid off from his job, he informed his wife one morning that he wasn't planning to return to the workforce. He decided he would become a fulltime artist, creating "high-end art" items from walnuts and the pits from apricots, peaches, plums and cherries, along with horse chestnuts, pine cones and hickory nuts. "My wife said I was crazy, that I needed a job to pay the mortgage and other household expenses," says Tanko.

"One weekend I showed my art at a local art fair and made \$200, and that convinced me that I could make a living from my art if I just kept at it." Since then his Creative Nutworks business has grown steadily thanks to his fascination with the beauty of the most basic and simple of nature's offerings - seeds, nuts and color.

Tanko's creations include sun catchers, crosses, wreaths, bowls, animals and a host

of other objects that can be hung on walls or displayed on shelves. Most pieces are priced at between \$35 and \$200, he says.

"Nuts and pits from fruit are some of the most-overlooked things in nature," Tanko says, "but they can become grand in the artist's hand."

Most of Tanko's creations are purchased by people attending art shows and craft fairs where Tanko is an exhibitor. He travels throughout the year to shows in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa and the Dakotas. He recently purchased an RV and plans to exhibit at more distant shows in the years ahead.

"I tell people I create art out of food leftovers," he says. "That really puzzles them until I show them my work, and then they understand."

Tanko can't really say how many hours a week he spends in his shop transforming nuts into works of art. "For me, it's kind of like breathing - it's just something I must do, and keep doing, because I love it and it makes me happy."

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Hershberger bought this old horse-drawn, loose hay loader for \$50.

Farmer Restores Vintage Horse-Drawn Hay Loader

Eli Hershberger is a Minnesota farmer who knows a good deal when he sees it, especially when it comes to vintage farm equipment. While he and his carpentry crew were roofing a farm shed in 2018, Hershberger noticed an old-fashioned loose hay loader sitting nearby. He asked the farmer if it was for sale, and the fellow said absolutely.

Hershberger bought the old loader for \$50 and began restoring it. With help from family members, he removed the hitch, wheels, gears, metal pickup and bearings that drove the wood rails because they were all rusted and in tough condition. He says it was a lot of work dismantling the loader, but they got everything apart without breaking it and were able to get the parts working again. The wood rails were dried and cracked so Hershberger made new ones and attached new tines.

Hershberger painted all the metal parts, lubricated the bearings, installed the new rails above the hay platform, and says the rebuilt

loader looks brand new. He put about \$1,000 into the restoration along with many hours of labor, but says the loader is now in perfect condition, just right for his farm. He'll pull the loader with two horses to pick up loose hay, using the machine like it was originally intended when it was built.

Hershberger says he was fortunate to get the loader for a real good price because sometimes they can go for \$500 or more at an auction if more than one person is bidding, and the restoration cost on top of that can make it quite an expensive piece of machinery.

Hershberger says the man he purchased it from remembers riding behind the loader on a hay rack when he was a youngster as it was pulled by a tractor driven by his grandfather.

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Plunkett replaced the small vinyl roof on his pontoon boat with a bigger one made from sheet metal siding.

Pontoon Boat Doubles As A Camper

When the small vinyl roof on his pontoon boat ripped and began leaking, Rick Plunkett replaced it with a bigger, stronger one made from sheet metal siding. Roll-up vinyl sides drop down to convert the pontoon into a camper, and on front is a sliding curtain made of clear vinyl. The roof quickly folds down for storage.

Plunkett also equipped the pontoon with a handy fishing rod table.

Three 3-ft. wide sections of screwed-on sheet metal were used to make the roof. It measures 8 ft. wide by 10 ft. long and is attached to the bottom part of a steel building garage door, which is supported by 6-ft. long legs made from 1-in. square, heavy gauge aluminum box tubing. The legs are U-bolted to the pontoon's handrail and set inside short lengths of box tubing, with one side cut out. A short bolt runs through the tubing and leg to form a hinge.

Plunkett bought new upholstery vinyl to make the camper's sides, which roll up onto lengths of pvc tubing that bolt onto the roof. When lowered, the sides attach to the pontoon's handrail. He installed a big half-moon window in each side by cutting a hole in the vinyl and then using a sewing machine to sew in a zipper removed from an old tent.

The heavy-duty, clear vinyl sliding curtain on front slides back and forth on a horizontal wire located near the roof. "The vinyl blows around in the wind a lot and I don't have a way to secure it at the bottom yet, so the only



Roll-up vinyl sides drop down to convert pontoon into a camper.

time I use it is when I'm camping. I roll it up and clamp it onto the wire whenever I'm out on the water," says Plunkett.

The fishing pole table is made from 2 sheets of 3/8-in. thick lexan separated by 2 1/2 in. spacers, and is designed to hold 4 fishing rods at an angle. Plunkett drilled four 3-in. dia. holes in the top sheet and four 2 1/2-in. dia. holes in the bottom sheet, with the 2 sets of holes slightly offset.

"The table top holes can also serve as cup holders," says Plunkett.

The entire table is supported by a 3 1/2-in. dia. steel pipe that sets inside a tapered metal base bolted onto the floor.

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