

Mechanical Fruit Picker Roundup

In the past fruit growers relied on labor to handpick fruit for the fresh fruit market. High labor costs and the challenge of finding workers have growers turning to mechanical harvesters instead. Several manufacturers have introduced equipment that promises to pick fruit gently and efficiently. It's estimated that one mechanical picker with a crew of four can do as much work as 80 hand-pickers.

Here are a few of the fresh fruit harvesters we found on the market.



Oxbo Fruit Harvester

Oxbo International manufactures equipment for many niche agricultural products and worked with Washington state researchers on developing surfaces to reduce bruised fruit. They sell SoftSurface kits that are suspended and fit on existing and new machines. www.oxbocorp.com

The Fulcrum Fresh Harvester, made by A&B Packing Equipment in Lawrence, Mich., features a wide 63-in. opening to minimize loss as the fruit goes into a tunnel. They say that with its design with horizontal rotary heads, and guide rails that lower the bush close to the sloped, padded harvesting



Fulcrum Fresh Harvester

beds for minimal drop makes it the "most gentle harvester available today." However, unlike other harvesters that have overhead platforms to pack lugs, separate wagons are needed to pile the lugs of fruit. www.abpacking.com

Littau Harvester, Stayton, Ore., has more than 2,500 of its berry harvesters sold to producers throughout the world. The company tests equipment on its own farm and developed the True Orbit shaker head, with tines that twirl to create less shock on the plants and angled catch surfaces that reduce losses to 5 percent or less. With adjustable features it's versatile for a wide variety of fruits. www.littauhvester.com



BSK Kokan Tow-Behind

A couple of overseas companies have other ideas for equipment. BSK of Serbia uses blasts of air to pick fruit with the Kokan, a tow-behind harvester that doesn't have contact with the plants or bushes. With easy adjustments for the pulsating air jets velocity and frequency, and pneumatic pillows for soft landing, it can be used on a variety of fresh fruits. www.airharvesters.com

The Harvy 500, manufactured by FineField of the Netherlands, utilizes bendable brushes and workers who shake the blueberry bushes to drop the ripe fruit into a conveyor system that includes air to blow out debris before the berries fall gently into lugs and crates. Plans were to test them in British Columbia this year. www.finefield.nl



Mechanical fruit harvesters save labor.



Drill Dock can be moved from shelf to bucket, to ladder or lift and has a place for bits and has an included bit gauge.

Drill Dock Keeps Drill And Bits Handy

The Drill Dock is a brand-new storage unit that keeps drills and bits together. "What makes it unique is the Drill Dock is portable," says Bryan Nooner, President and inventor at Midwest Innovative Products in Ill. "It's a modular design."

The Drill Dock can attach to a shop table via its commercial strength clip. And, with a quick touch of a button, The Drill Dock can get moved to a shelf in a work truck, a tool bag, a bucket, a job site, and many other places.

The drill slides into the Drill Dock, and it's a great way to keep organized. Nooner knows that from personal experience.

"I've run a construction company for about 40 years," he says. "My company builds new homes, and I invented the Drill Dock and many other products based on the needs I see out on our job sites."

"We can use the Dock when guys are up on lifts working on garage doors or buildings," Nooner says. "You can attach a Drill Dock to bucket lifts, scissor lifts and things like that."

The slot the drill fits in will handle almost every drill or driver on the market. Some larger impact drills won't fit, but Nooner says 90 percent of the drills you can find at Lowe's, Home Depot and other tool stores will fit the Drill Dock.

Those lost drill bits will be a thing of the past, thanks to a heavy-duty magnet attached to the side of the Drill Dock.

A handy drill bit gauge on the Drill Dock can also help you figure out if you have the right-sized bit for a particular job.

Nooner says its durable commercial resins are impact-resistant. "We've dropped one from 20 feet up on a scissor lift," he says.

"Nothing breaks on the Drill Dock because it's extremely tough."

The Drill Dock will be available in yellow or red. He first began tinkering with the idea several years ago, but Nooner kicked the development process into high gear last year.

"We introduced the product at the National Hardware Show in October," he says. "It won several awards and was well accepted by every retailer. Companies like Walmart, Home Depot and Lowe's have already agreed to carry the line as soon as it's ready for distribution."

Nooner says the company is in pre-production and plans to start supplying their retail partners with products in Feb.

"You can pre-order them online and get a \$10 discount," says Nooner.

The red or yellow Drill Dock retails for \$29.95.

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Square Top Barrel Makes Cleanup Easy

"You can lay it on its side to sweep in leaves or construction debris and the barrels won't roll away," says Jon Steeves, a Connecticut based landscaper and inventor of the Square Barrel.

"We made it wide enough to get a standard rake in," he says. "It also fits a standard 24-in. push broom if you'd like to sweep debris into it."

The orange barrel is square at the top and tapers to a round bottom. Steeves says that makes it easier to roll or drag away.

The Square Barrels stack well and are easy to store. He says if a farmer lined up three of the barrels next to each other, it'd be easy to put feed into a loader bucket and fill the barrels without spilling, thanks to the wide square mouth.

"When we were putting it together, we wanted this thing to be durable," he recalls. "It's weight-rated for 2,000 lbs. It holds 70 gals. We're hoping to add different sizes to the lineup in the future."

People interested in a Square Barrel can go to the website to find a store locator. Steeves has more than 120 businesses set up as dealers. Price typically ranges between \$99 and \$120, depending on who you buy



Jon Steeves invented the Square Barrel to ease cleanup and have a large opening to fit a rake or broom head.

it from."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Jon Steeves, The Square Barrel, 306 Berkshire Road, Sandy Hook, Conn., 06482 (ph 888-220-8721, Ext 1; sales@thesquarebarrel.com; www.thesquarebarrel.com).

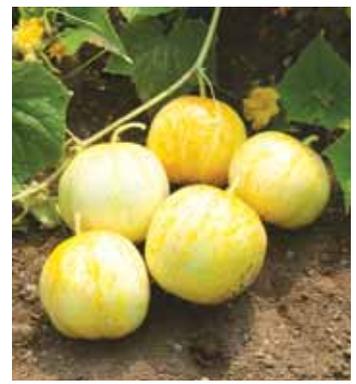
Grow Cukes With A Lemon Twist

It's that time of year when garden catalogs entice you with new varieties to grow. The lemon cucumber recently caught our attention.

Believed to originate from India or the Middle East in the 16th Century, the variety has been in the U.S. since the late 1800's and is most noted for its round shape and yellow color. The name is based on that, but it doesn't have a lemon taste. It has a mild, sweet flavor with a cool, crispy texture.

In reviews, gardeners say they love the flavor, and that the variety has good yields. Many warn, however, that the cucumbers should be harvested before they get too big. When they are fully grown, about the size of a tennis ball, the skins get tough and the seeds are big and hard, according to reviewers. Instead, pick them when they are the size of ping-pong balls and mostly green when the skin is tender enough to eat.

Growing them is similar to other cucumber varieties. Plant seeds 36 to 60-in. apart on hills in well-drained soil in a sunny location. Keep the soil moist, at least an inch/week.



Lemon cucumbers have a yellow color and round shape with a mild, sweet flavor and cool, crispy texture.

They are ready to harvest in about 70 days.

Lemon cucumbers can be eaten plain or pickled and used in a variety of recipes. Many garden catalogs carry them, such as www.johnnyseeds.com (ph 877-564-6697).