



More Hobby Farmers' Tips & Tricks

Check out the farm-ready tricks that the HobbyFarms.com editorial bloggers have up their sleeves.

Catch a Donkey ... or Llama ... or Ram

“We once took in a trio of abused donkeys that were impossible to catch. We erected a small pen in a corner of their pasture, fed them there, and within a week, could easily corner and catch them. Since then, we’ve saved innumerable hours of annoyance and effort by maintaining catch pens for hard-to-capture critters on our farm. With the advent of sturdy round-pen panels made from welded pipe, building low-cost, species-specific catch pens is a cinch. For instance, our touch-me-not llamas are easily herded into a pen created from 10- by 5-foot panels. A smaller pen can be erected in the rams’ fold, where the guys crowd in for a special treat.”

—HF contributing editor Sue Weaver tends a varied menagerie, including Nubian-buck blogger Martok, on her Arkansas farm. Follow Sue and Martok at “Mondays with Martock.”

A Little Heat Goes a Long Way

“While laying black plastic water pipe from our house to the gardens, I had my fill of pounding in tees, elbows and connectors. Then I recalled a lesson learned from a shop mechanic while working on a baler: He pointed out that it would be easier pulling the flywheel off a shaft if we heated the flywheel first. It’s amazing how little heat expansion it takes to free up a frozen shaft, and the same holds true for plastic pipe. I set up a propane camp stove and heated water to a boil while I worked. Sticking the pipe ends into the boiling water worked best, but if that wasn’t possible, I poured it over the ends. The connector or elbow slipped in, and in no time, it was clamped into place.”

—Jim Ruen, a farm equipment and tool expert, lives in Minnesota and pens the “Shop Talk” blog.

Mulch Like Mad

“A good, thick mulch works magic in the garden—keeping weeds at bay (the ones that do grow are easier to pull), retaining moisture so you don’t have to water as often, preventing cold weather damage to plants, and adding nutrients and organic matter to the soil as it breaks down. I mulch my berries, shrubs, herbs and flowers at least once a year using a mulch my clever friend created from used coffee grounds, dried cow manure and coffee-bean chaff called Latte Doo Doo. In the vegetable garden, I layer straw, grass hay, compost and burlap coffee bags. I even use soiled fleece from our sheep to mulch around our apple trees.”

—Cherie Langlois blogs about “Country Discoveries” on and off her Washington hobby farm, where she has gardened and tended animals for 20 years.

Keep Your Tools Close

“Our shed sits pretty far from the garden, so I save time by keeping my frequently used garden tools in an old army locker in a corner of the garden. It’s just tall enough for my shovel and rake, and there’s a nice little shelf on top for my pruners and trowel. Its ‘footprint’ is an 18-inch circle, so it takes up very little room. Plus, it has a lovely antiques look and makes quite the conversation piece for visitors.”

—Green-thumbed garden writer Jessica Walliser lives in Pennsylvania and gives the practical “Dirt on Gardening.”

Copy Your Neighbors

“When selecting plants and flowers for your garden, a tour of your neighborhood provides invaluable information as to varieties that grow well in your area. Gardeners who let themselves get carried away in the nursery often find that something that looks enticing on the racks will not perform well once planted in their own gardens. Many nurseries sell plants that grow well in their wholesale growers’ facilities, not necessarily ones that will thrive in your particular environment. However, seeing a plant flourishing in your neighbor’s garden is an excellent sign that the species will grow well in your own yard.”

—California-born Rick Gush lives in Italy and writes about his gardening adventures in his blog, “La Dolce Vita.”



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