

# Farm Toys Are On This Woman's Wish List

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**GLEN ROCK (York Co.)**—While children around the world are busy making "wish" lists for Santa, Hazel Walker keeps a "have" list of her toys.

Hazel, an enthusiastic collector of toy farm equipment, maintains a careful record of her machinery lineup in a small notebook. With each new -- or old -- piece she acquires, the Glen Rock farm woman swells her "black book" list with pertinent details of the transaction.

Though she began collecting less than 10 years ago, Hazel has put together an impressive array of farm machinery toys in all sizes, colors, makes and models. They range from the 1/64-scale size, so small a combine easily fits into a child's palm, to the 1/16-scale loved by farm youngsters for imitating dad's field chores.

While many farm -- and non-farm -- men collect toy farm equipment and trucks, Hazel is one of a far fewer number of women who enjoy this hobby.

Years ago, Hazel admired a plastic Farmall Model M toy tractor owned by a neighbor. After the neighbor's death, his son gave her the old toy as a gift. It became part of the impetus to add another, and another -- and the collection hasn't stopped growing.

Unlike junior farmers across the country with toy equipment on their Christmas lists, Hazel doesn't wait for the holiday season to expand her collection.

"If I see something, I'm going to get it," she grins. "I don't wait for a special occasion." Her enthusiasm has gotten Hazel well acquainted with area equipment dealerships, where she makes frequent contacts about new toy introductions.

Some of Hazel's farm toys are several decades old. A large, tin, toy tractor, missing only some paint on the top where little hands probably maneuvered it through imaginary fields, is a favorite of the more vintage lineup. A smaller, plastic model, bearing the molded-in name of the Hubley company, also dates back at least a generation.

Five years ago, she purchased a box of assorted old toys from a young acquaintance. In it were treasures that included a to-scale corn picker implement which has been fitted to an appropriate tractor, and a three-bottom plow complete with a toothpick for a hitch pin.

Holding a special place in the collection are two toy tractors which belonged to the Walkers' youngest son, Larry, 24. The Allis-Chalmers 190 and International 1026 have been painstakingly restored by an acquaintance of the Walkers.

"Restoring toys is like restoring regular equipment. They have to be torn apart and repainted. Sometimes parts have to be replaced," Hazel explains of the like-new pair of tractors, shielded from dust by plastic covers over cardboard frames. A feather duster helps keep the tiny equipment that isn't kept plastic-covered or in boxes clean and shiny.

Because her toy collecting interest is fairly recent, Hazel laments the loss of equipment toys played with and loved by her husband, Norman, and her older children. Leroy, 35, had a variety of farm equipment toys, passed down and added to over the years for younger siblings Dale, Jerry, Penny and Larry.

Now the toy tractors and implements purchased by Hazel go, not under Christmas trees or behind birthday wrapping paper, but on special shelves built by Norman and their sons for the collection.

Some of Hazel's newer acquisitions are limited-edition reproductions issued in commemoration of certain farm events, like the shiny, miniature Ford Powermaster made for sale at the 1991 Pennsylvania Farm Show. Special issues are also made by some equipment firms, saluting various years or other, large farm equipment shows. Hazel's commemorative tractors includes some from the Louisville, Kentucky, equipment exposition.

For several years, Norman participated in farm-tractor pulls around the region. Special commemoratives from national tractor pulling competitions also dot Hazel's collection, as well as



Among Hazel Walker's favorites in her toy farm equipment collection are a vintage tin tractor and a mounted corn-picker implement.

assorted pieces she found at toy equipment shows held in conjunction with such events.

Along with the toy farm equipment, Hazel has a convoy of farm-related commemorative trucks. Several are issues of farm equipment firms, tiny truck rigs hitched to miniature flatbeds, hauling diminutive tractors in appropriate styles and colors.

Added yearly to her collection are the annual Hess fuel company commemorative trucks, ranging in style from reproductions of state-of-the-art tankers to early models of fuel delivery trucks.

Though not a farm implement, a large Tonka toy fire engine holds a place of honor among "Mom's toys," as her children teasingly describe Hazel's collection. It previously belonged to Norman's uncle, whose collecting interest focused solely on toy fire engines.

Another special item is a vintage toy "western ranch set," with a log cabin fashioned of tin, and plastic accessories that include animals, cowboys and fence pieces, all of plastic. In like-new condition, the set was a gift from a friend.

As interest in toy farm equipment and trucks has escalated in the past few years, the hobby-

market-driven prices have climbed appreciably. Even the boxes are in demand.

"If you have the original boxes with the toys, it makes them worth that much more," explains Hazel. Thus, even when she removes equipment pieces from their packaging for display, the boxes are carefully stored.

"Prices are getting expensive, especially for some of the real old models, like the International 460 and 560," this toy enthusiast notes. And, it is not unusual for special commemorative items, like tractors, to double in value overnight, due to the limited number produced.

As her collection has grown, Hazel is becoming very selective about additions to her toy equipment and truck lineup.

"I started out collecting the implements, too, but I'm going

now to just the tractors, because of the volume and the storage room it requires," she says. While not in the business of dealing toys, Hazel has, on occasion, sold a few of the limited number of duplicates on her shelves.

Hazel's toy enthusiasm is starting to spill over to other family members. Both grandsons, Matt, one of the Walkers' six grandchildren, and their son Jerry have an interest in collecting farm-related toy trucks.

The Walkers have farmed this rural section of southern York County for 37 years, on land that previously was owned by Norman's uncle. Since dispersing their dairy herd seven years ago, the Walkers now concentrate on grain cropping, feeding steers and heifers, and raising pheasants for private hunting preserve use.

## Homestead Notes

### Christmas Tree Success

**COLLEGE PARK, Md.** — Your gift list is complete, right down to the last stocking stuffer. Christmas lights and ornaments have been retrieved from the attic, waiting to be hung on that true holiday symbol, the Christmas tree.

But before you purchase your tree, consider these helpful hints from Ray Bosmans, a horticulture specialist with the Home and Garden Information Center of the Cooperative Extension Service, Maryland Institute for Agriculture and Natural Resources. MIANR is one of three research and public service institutions of the University of Maryland System.

If you're like most Marylanders — 64 percent, in fact — you'll probably pick up a Scotch Pine as your Yuletide symbol. These trees are generally 5 to 8 feet tall. About 10 percent of Marylanders choose a White Pine, with the remainder selecting a Douglas Fir, Colorado Blue Spruce or other variety.

Christmas trees are an agricultural crop, requiring careful species selection and 8 to 15 years of ongoing care as they grow. Prices tend to reflect the time-consuming nature of their production.

You can expect to pay anywhere from \$20 to \$35 for your tree, with a possible savings if you go to one of Maryland's "choose and cut" Christmas tree farms. For more information on these farms, consult the "Maryland Christmas Tree Directory" published by the Maryland Christmas Tree Association in cooperation with Extension and the Maryland Department of Agriculture. This helpful guide is generally published in Maryland newspapers the first week of December, and is available at public libraries, county Extension offices and the Home and Garden Information Center.

If you're going to buy a pre-cut tree, go early in the season and look for the "Maryland Grown Christmas Tree — Green, Fresh, Fragrant" sign and for the "Maryland with Pride" logo. This indicates freshness; none of these trees is cut before November.

Go to a Christmas tree lot during the day, when there is ample light to properly inspect the trees. Then follow these simple guidelines:

\* Check the tree's color; a gray-green or yellow shade indicates a dry tree.

\* Bend and pull the needles at the ends of the branches; if they snap or pull off easily, the tree is sure to drop its needles when installed in your home's warm interior.

\* Finally, bang the base of your prospective purchase on concrete. If the exterior, new-growth needles plummet, the tree is a potential tinderbox.

Okay, so you've picked the perfect tree and brought your prize home. Now what?

Bosmans recommends cutting two inches off the bottom of the tree's trunk (just one inch if you cut your own tree) and then immediately plunging the cut end into 80- to 100-degree F water. This is important because the tree won't absorb cold water.

If you're not taking the tree inside immediately, store it on the north side of your house (so it gets shade) and completely replace the warm water periodically. When you're ready to bring it inside, cut another half inch off the trunk, and repeat the warm water treatment.

Place the tree away from radiators or other sources of heat.

A plain, galvanized tree stand is best because it releases zinc, a bacterial inhibitor. If you don't have a galvanized stand, add a

teaspoon of bacteria-killing household bleach to each gallon of warm water. Uncontrolled bacterial growth can clog a tree's pores, preventing it from absorbing water.

Avoid gimmicks — such as adding sugar, molasses, honey, aspirin or pennies to the water. They do nothing to extend a tree's indoor life. In fact, the sugars may encourage bacterial and fungal growth, producing an unpleasant odor.

Properly watered, there is no reason a tree won't keep indoors for three weeks, according to Bosmans. When the time comes for disposal, think about using the

limbs as winter cover for your outdoor plants. You can burn stumps in the fireplace, or even stand the tree up in your backyard and string it with popcorn for the birds.

For more information on Christmas trees and other holiday plants, call your local Cooperative Extension Service Office; phone numbers are listed under county (and Baltimore City) headings in the blue pages of the telephone directory. Residents of central Maryland should call the Home and Garden Information Center at 1-800-342-2507. Specialists are available to answer questions between 8 a.m. and 1 p.m., Monday through Friday.

