

At Sanborn Mills Farm, preserving the past and planning for the future go hand in hand!

Sanborn Mills Farm_

September 2018 eNews



www.sanbornmills.org

Sometimes the simplest solution is best -



Ray Ramsey cutting oats with a European (or Austrian) style scythe.

Next to the shovel and the hoe, the scythe is one of the oldest agricultural tools. Images of people harvesting hay and grain with scythes go back to Roman times. The scythe evolved from the hand-held sickle and became increasingly important during medieval times, when people in northern climates needed to cut large amounts of hay to feed their livestock through long winters.

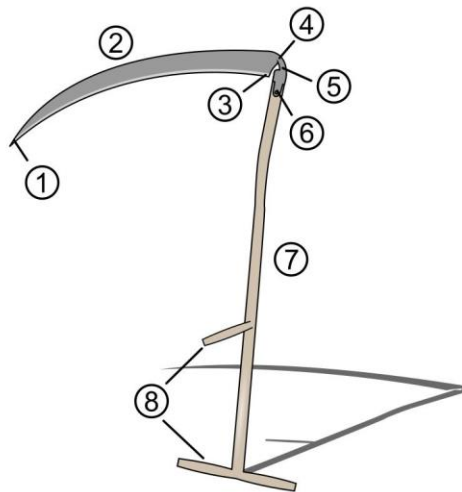
According to the website www.themodernhomestead.us "The pinnacle of scythe-making arrived when blacksmiths (from the seventeenth century on) began forging blades from bars of both iron and mild steel, folding them over each other and hammering them into numerous layers like pages in a book. The steel holds the blade's shape, and can be honed to a fine cutting edge; the iron tempers the steel's brittleness with flexibility, reducing the chance of breakage when the blade hits a rock."

Using a scythe can appear to be a slow and tiring process, especially compared with modern equipment. But in small scale agriculture, there are other factors to consider. In Alexander Langlands's book *Craeft An Inquiry into the Origins and True Meanings of Traditional Crafts*, he recounts how a passerby first taught him how to use a scythe . . .



When scything, keeping a sharp edge on the blade is essential. Ray first sharpens this European blade by peening it and then periodically hones the edge with a whetstone as he works.

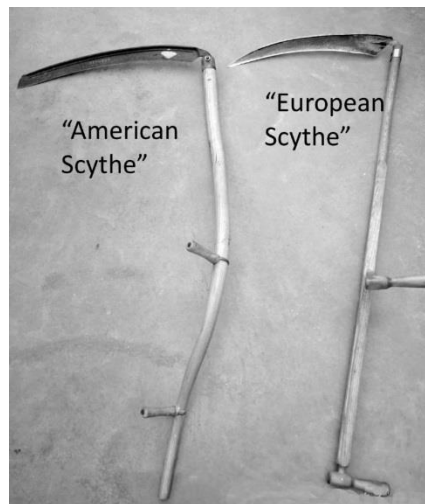
"Within seconds he was smearing a drop of spit down the blade with a whetstone, working up a fine abrasive paste and softly grinding a shining edge on the black patina of the antiquated iron. Razor sharpness was everything.... Holding the blade parallel to the ground and as far away from the body as was comfortable, he drew it towards himself in an arching motion, slicing - not hacking - through the undergrowth. The hollow ringing sound of the blade scything through the grass and weeds was clean and appealing. But what's more the speed and effectiveness was astonishing. On the back swing a brushing technique could be adopted with the rear of the blade, teeing up any fallen plants to be sliced through on the returning swipe. I was impressed. And while the job had probably taken me a fraction longer than with a strimmer, I'd enjoyed listening to the sound of the birds while I worked..... And so, my relationship with craeft had begun."



Parts of a scythe: 1-toe; 2-chine; 3-beard; 4-heel; 5-tang; 6-ring; 7-snath or snaith; 8-grips

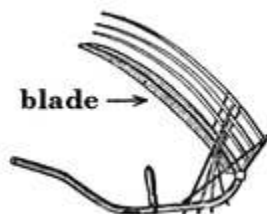
Like many tools, the parts of a scythe have interesting names. The long shaft is most often called a *snaith* or *snath*, and sometimes a *sned*. Traditionally the snaith it is made of wood but you may find modern ones made from metal. According to Sjoerd W. Duiker in his article on [Mowing with Scythes](#), "*The American scythe has a thicker, narrower, straight blade made of hard steel. To allow the straight blade to closely follow the soil surface, the American scythe has an intricately curved snath (handle).*"

He points out that "*The European scythe, on the other hand, has a blade that is much thinner, curved, and made of a slightly softer steel than the American scythe. Because the shape of the blade allows it to follow the soil surface, the snath of the European scythe is straight or almost straight.*"



The European style scythe is sometimes referred to as Austrian.

Traditionally, a cradle is added to a scythe when harvesting grain. The additional support helps to keep the stems aligned, which makes the collection and threshing easier.



For more information on scythes, visit these websites:

- <https://smallfarmersjournal.com/mowing-with-scythes/>
- <https://onescytherevolution.com/a-tale-of-two-scythes.html>

Recapping the summer . . .

It was a busy summer on the farm and here are a few highlights.

Workshops . . .



In June, Wendy Jensen (right) taught students a sturdy field basket.



In July, Michelle Hollick (center) taught a traditional floor cloth workshop. Both Michele and Wendy will be teaching workshops again next season so stay tuned to our website. The 2019 schedule will be posted in mid-November.



The oxen workshops took people out into the fields, gardens, and the woods to learn about animal traction power.



In a 4-day ox yoke workshop, Tim Huppe helped students make the all-important New England style neck yoke.



The Blacksmith Teaching Studio was busy with Garry Kalajian teaching students basic forging techniques and how to manage a traditional coal-fired forge.



This season we added more specialty blacksmithing workshops. Lucian Avery taught a carving knife workshop that combined forging with woodworking.



Joel Tripp taught a workshop in woodworking tools that challenged students to make a chisel and an adze. Some students made a punch and flux spoons as well.

A visit from our seasonal artist-in-residence . . .



Scenic artist Bob Braun was back with us again this summer adding to the paintings in the mudroom entry. Depictions of vegetables, tools, seed catalogs, and advertisements for farm equipment create the flavor of life on a 19th century farm.



Meticulous brushwork and thin layers of paint create the illusion of three-dimensions around the room, a style known as trompe l'oeil. At our recent Open House, one gentleman reached up to pull the handle of the cupboard door. That gesture was a true measure of success for Bob!

Annual Open House & Water Powered Mill Demonstration Day

On July 29, visitors were able to enjoy the beauty of the farm and see some of the progress with the buildings. Even though water was low, we were able to run both the grist mill and saw mill.



Clockwise from upper left: Garry Kalajian demonstrated blacksmithing; Ray Ramsey and Tyler Allen demonstrated plowing in the Teaching Garden; Bob Braun explained his approach to paintings in the mudroom entry; and John Schlang and Jordan Pinto demonstrated rolling logs into the mill pond.



Clockwise from upper left: Jake Famer demonstrated grinding corn in the Grist Mill; Emma Woodward showed visitors the intricacies of traditional window making in the Wood Shop; Colin Cabot demonstrated flax preparation in the Old Blacksmith Shop; and Ray Ramsey explained the challenges of managing pests in a healthy garden.

How does a corn kernel grow?

If you have a home garden and you managed to save some of your precious sweet corn from the hordes of squirrels and other hungry wildlife that are so abundant this season - or you picked some sweet corn up at a local farmer's market, you may wonder why there are so many silky threads around the corn cob and what's up with that big fluffy tassel at the top of the stalk.



The answer can be found in the way nature orchestrates propagation for plants and animals, namely that it "takes two to tango!" Corn is monoecious, which means that it grows both male and female flowers on the same plant. The tassel - the male flower - typically emerges from the stalk late June to late July. When mature, the tops of the tassels - the anthers - disperse clouds of nearly microscopic pollen, which make their way to the silky female flowers emerging from the newly forming cobs. The amazing feature of a corn cob is that each strand of silk you peel away when shucking your corn is responsible for creating one delicious corn kernel.



While corn stalks often find their way to becoming decorations tied around posts or mailboxes, other parts of the corn - especially the husks - can be used as well.



Check out some of these ideas:

- Corn husk dolls - <https://everythingbackyard.net/learn-how-to-make-easy-corn-husk-dolls/>
- Corn husk wreathes - <http://chickensintheroad.com/house/crafts/how-to-make-a-corn-husk-wreath/>
- Corn silk tea - <https://www.webmd.com/vitamins/ai/ingredientmono-140/corn-silk>

Building a tuteur . . .

A tuteur is a three-dimensional garden structure designed to enable - or train - climbing plants to ascend securely and gracefully. While some tuteurs are simple pyramids made from slats of wood or metal, if creatively designed a tuteur can add a dramatic architectural feature to a garden. This summer Colin Cabot replicated two tuteurs that he grew up seeing at [Stonecrop Gardens](#) in Cold Spring, New York, each one a challenge in precision joinery.



Still looking to get your hands busy this season?

Workshops are wrapping up but we still have one more space in the Door Hardware workshop October 21 & 22. Come make something of your own design for your historic home or barn. [Click here](#) if you are interested.



And if you are already looking ahead, we are working on lining up the 2019 workshop season. Workshops will be posted to our website by mid-November. The best way to stay informed is by signing up for eNews on our home page: www.sanbornmills.org

The Ox Corner by Tim Huppe

[Click here](#) for the first installment of Ox Tips.



Credits for photos & quotes:

Historic photo of scything with cradles courtesy of [Germans from Russia Heritage Collection](#)
Photo of American & European scythes courtesy of [Small Farmers Journal](#)
Photo of workshop students with finished ox yokes by Tim Huppe.
Photos #1-#4 of Open House photos by Emily Ostroff.
Photos of mudroom entry way by Bob Braun.
All other Images by Lynn Martin Graton.



Alexander Langland quote from his book *Craeft*, which is available on Amazon.

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A traditional New Hampshire farm and nonprofit organization dedicated to sustainability, creativity, and preserving folklife skills and agricultural knowledge so that the best of the past can help shape our future.

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