

2023 October 28 Gardeners' Dirt

Scarecrows: They never go out of style

By Linda Lees | Victoria County Master Gardener



PHOTOS BY LINDA LEES/VICTORIA COUNTY MASTER GARDENER – Meet Leroy, the official scarecrow of the Victoria Educational Gardens



A scarecrow in a potted plant for decoration.



Leroy is the official scarecrow of the Victoria Educational Gardens

There was a scarecrow that hung around the garden for years. He wasn't much to look at. In fact, you had to look twice to make sure he was indeed what he was supposed to be.

He stood about 6-feet tall and was constructed of 2x4s nailed in the shape of a cross. A faded long sleeve shirt was his only clothing. But he did have a name. He was Ole Buckethead. Where there should have been a noggin topped by a straw hat, there was a rusted, busted up pail.

Kinfolks agreed Buckethead was indeed a sad sight. To add insult to injury, his job was almost impossible. Try chasing off crows and numerous other birdbrains when you are forever rooted to one spot. Though he did get revenge when an 11-year-old youngster chucked rocks at him. At the time Buckethead was sheltering a nest of angry wasps.

So, a word to the wise. Don't mess with scarecrows.

They have been around since the beginning of recorded history beginning with the Egyptians. They were commonly seen in gardens up to the mid-20th century when pesticides not only decreased the number of insects but birds as well.

Nowadays it is almost impossible to find a functioning scarecrow. For the most part they are seen with the fall season when they are trotted out with the carved pumpkins to the front yard, or when designed for festival competitions. They've also been downsized to table decorations, door wreaths and floral arrangements.

Modern day scarecrows come in both sexes, kind of like Raggedy Anne dolls. They wear cute costumes and are a far cry from the bogeyman images associated with them.

Making a scarecrow is not difficult. It can be as simple as making a Buckethead clone. However, if you really want to get creative you can find inspiration by googling "scarecrow" on your computer or putting out a search on YouTube. YouTube offers many demonstrations and ideas.

I selected to make my scarecrow frame with 3/4-inch PVC tubing. I also purchased a "cross" 3/4-inch fitting to allow me to make the traditional scarecrow cross. It would have been easier to use a garden hat, a flower pot or pumpkin for a head but I decided to make one.

I used a 24-inch scrap of burlap which I converted into a “bag” tied at the bottom with a piece of rope. I filled the head with plastic bags and using some outdoor craft paint painted a primitive face. I slipped the head onto the neck and tightened the rope. A decorated hat was hot glued to the head.

For the body I used one of my Master Gardener T-shirts topped with an extra-large cowboy shirt. I found the shirt along with some torn jeans at the Goodwill Store in Victoria.

I cut a hole in the bottom of the jeans so they could be run up the tubing. Rope was tied onto the front and back belt strips and adjusted so that the top of the jeans would be covered by the T-shirt.

The rope suspenders hung from the shoulders. I did not stuff the arms and the legs since I wanted a functioning scarecrow that moved in the breeze. To further weaponize my creation I added flashy party tassels for hands, feet and a hat topping.

My scarecrow may have a PVC frame but he is old fashioned compared to today’s the more technical scarecrows, particularly those accompanied by annoying propane powered automatic noise guns. Using whirligigs, plastic snakes, windchimes and water blaster guns sounds like far more fun.

The Gardeners’ Dirt is written by members of the Victoria County Master Gardener Association, an educational outreach of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension – Victoria County. Mail your questions in care of the Advocate, P.O. Box 1518, Victoria, TX 77901; or vcmga@vicad.com, or comment on this column at VictoriaAdvocate.com.