

The \$50, 2-Ton, Cowboy Lettuce Spinner

What's a lettuce spinner? They're used for drying lettuce and salad greens after you rinse them: you've seen the little plastic ones for the home kitchen that the hardware store sells, that handle about 4 ounces of lettuce, right? If you need to go bigger than that, there's one that Johnny's Seeds sells for \$300 that handles a pound of lettuce, but you have to crank it by hand, and the plastic gears wear out in 3 to 6 months of serious use. You can get that in a motorized version for only \$700 (it's probably got plastic gears too).

Those won't do you any good if you're processing **500 pounds a day** of a leafy greens product. You can purchase a new Hobart stainless steel spinner which handles 5 pounds of greens total for \$5,700 (plus shipping). However, there's a much better way to do it if you don't have a trust fund!

Here's how you make your own commercial-grade, heavy-duty, approved-by-your-State-Health-Department 2-ton vegetable spinner the Cowboy way. Note: cowboys (and cowgirls!) are my heroes; they are those who, forced by economic circumstances, must always do more with fewer resources. Here's an example of this: a cowboy drives a 20-year old, 2-wheel drive pickup truck because of economics; but the engine is in good shape, and the tires have lots of tread on them. He has a pair of tire chains (Sears, \$69.95) under the seat, and when they're on the rear wheels, he can pull a brand new, \$45,000 4WD pickup truck out of the mud it's stuck in, because **his** truck has better traction. `Nuff said.

First, buy a 20-gallon "Husky" grey NSF (says "NSF" on bottom of can) garbage can at Home Depot, Lowe's, or your local hardware store. Take the garbage can with you, plus a tape measure, when you visit the local used washing machine store; this would be the Salvation Army, Goodwill, or similar organization. We actually **have** a used washing machine (and refrigerator, and freezer, and dryer) store where we live; and we don't mind slumming there to save \$5,650.

That's where you buy a decent washing machine that's otherwise broken but has a good spin cycle for \$25 or so, because the spin cycle is all you need. There's absolutely no need to purchase a brand-new machine; just run a cycle of Chlorox water through it after you're finished with all the modifications we're going to describe in this article.

When you're at the UWMS (Used Washing Machine Store), make sure the machine fits the can; measure the washing machine drum to make sure it's a slightly larger diameter than the can. Don't worry about not being able to fit the can through the top of the machine; because you're going to remove the top, throw it away, and replace it with something else soon. When you

get the machine home, take the center shaft out of the drum, in a way that the machine still works and doesn't leak.

This requires someone with mechanical skills, like a car mechanic, a welder or machinist. It may involve using a cutting torch and a metal grinder, or it may be as simple as taking off a single nut (**Work Safely!**); I've seen both of these situations in my four UWMC's (Used Washing Machine Conversions). This is because they always have a different machine at the UWMS, **never** the one you converted the last time you did it. I've done four of these now, and I had to throw one washing machine away because when I gutted it, it wouldn't work because of the way it was designed. But \$25 once in seven years? So what!

Next, you take the top off the washing machine and replace it with a piece of 1/4 inch thick polyethylene sheet so it's acceptable to your local Health Department, retaining the machine's rotary switch, and mounting it on something strong, washable, and durable; so you can turn the spin cycle on and off later. Then, you drill a bunch of quarter-inch diameter holes around the perimeter of the bottom of the garbage can about 1 inch apart, and two more sets 3 inches up the sides and 6 inches up the sides, about 2" apart.

Next, set your can down into the converted machine, mark a line 2 inches above the new polyethylene machine top surface, take the can out of the machine and cut it off at your 2-inch line. You're done! You now have what we affectionately refer to as the "2-ton lettuce spinner". They can easily handle 5 pounds at a time, spin it dry in 30 seconds, and last for years.

The total cost for materials is \$50, and compared to a \$5,700 Hobart stainless steel spinner (which handles exactly the same weight: 5 pounds!) it's a deal!

We've gone through 2 in seven years and are on our third now. Aloha, Tim.....