

Here are seven helpful hints from Homestead 77

By Marjorie Burris

Homestead Entry Survey Number 77: that was the legal description given to our old ranch when it was “proved up” and filed on in 1915. It still bears that name. We think it is a fitting name for “our piece of Eden.” However, just like any other place, there is a lot of hard work to be done on the old homestead. Here are seven things we have found that “lighten our load.”

1. Scrap wood boot remover

It’s mud and snow time, and taking off gunky boots is a chore. We make that messy job easier with a boot remover made out of scrap wood. To make a boot remover, use a 1 inch board 5 inches wide and 12 inches long. Cut a sharp V in one end of the board. Make the V about 3½ inches long with the sharp end of the notch centered on the board. Next, nail a cleat the same width as the board and about one inch deep and one inch wide at the base of the V. Turn the boot remover over so that the notched end sticks up in the air. Use one foot to hold down the un-notched end, then stick the heel of the other boot into the boot and pull. Easy removal.

2. Handkerchiefs from old cotton linens

Winter also means cold and flu season and more nose blowing. My husband refuses to use paper tissues because they aren’t strong enough, and I refuse to wash slimy, germ ridden handkerchiefs. We found a solution which pleases us both. I buy old cotton sheets, pillow cases, table cloths, whatever I can find, at the thrift store and tear them into handkerchief size pieces. After using them, we burn them in the heating stove. Burning is the best way to destroy germs. We have clean handkerchiefs without spreading the disease.

3. Preserve tools with used motor oil

So you changed oil in all your engines before winter set in and now you have jugs of used oil setting around? Use some of that oil as preservative for wooden tool handles, old leather boots, and even old leather gloves that are used for dirty jobs. (I put on the gloves, pour a little used oil in the palm, and rub down the tool handles and my boots.) Don’t forget the wheelbarrow handles, and while you’re at it, put a little oil on the axle through the wheel. Look around and oil everything in sight. Maybe you can use all that oil and preserve your tools “to boot.”

4. Pine cones for kindling

Tired of splitting kindling wood for fire starting? We use pine cones in place of kindling wood. In the fall, when the cones are dry, I roll them into a pile with a broom rake. Then I lay a 50 pound dog food sack beside the pile and scoop the cones into the sack with gloved hands. Takes less than 10 minutes to fill a sack, and my yard is free of cones. We use about 12 sacks of cones during the winter and store them in the wood shed to keep them dry. Much less work than splitting kindling.

5. Uses for wood ashes

Winter also means more ashes from the wood burning heating stove. Wood ashes are six to ten percent potassium (also called potash), so they make a good organic fertilizer for the garden. In addition, they tend to sweeten acid soil. We dump our ashes onto the garden on top of the snow and let the nitrogen in the snow and the potassium in the ashes sink into the garden together.

We also keep a large **metal** can full of ashes in the outhouse. Ashes hold heat for a **very** long time and can start a fire easily if they are stored in com-

bustible containers. We use a one-pound coffee can as a dipper and spread a dipper full of ashes in the toilet hole after use. Keeps the outhouse smelling sweet and helps compost the human waste.

6. Make those short blankets longer

Do you wake up with cold feet in the middle of a freezing winter night because your blankets have pulled out from under the foot of the mattress? I cut an old thin blanket or a sheet into thirds across its width and sew one third onto a blanket making a “tail.” When I make the bed, I tuck the tail up under the mattress at the foot. The longer blanket gives us plenty of room to cover our heads and still stay tucked in at the foot.

7. Elastic tabs for fitted sheet corners

Fitted sheets that won’t stay put over the corners of the mattress do not make a comfortable bed any time of the year. To keep the sheet in place, I make an elastic tab and sew it on each sheet corner. I cut a 12-inch length of elastic band off the top of old jockey shorts. Then I sew one end of the elastic on either side of the seam in the corner of the sheet, spacing the ends of the elastic about six inches from the seam and forming a triangle. When making the bed, I fit the sheet corner in place, then slip the elastic down under the corner of the mattress and pull the corner tight. Unless you have a terrible night of tossing and turning, the elastic keeps the corner in place. Sweet dreams. Δ