

Version:1.0 StartHTML:0000000181 EndHTML:0000002707 StartFragment:0000002362  
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SourceURL:file:///localhost/Users/computer/Desktop/OBITS/barefootfarmer.doc

A harrow is the implement we use after plowing to break up clods, level the field and prepare a seedbed. There are several different kinds of harrows. Which one to use depends on the soil type, and the specific goal to be accomplished, and what you have.

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The farm I bought in 1974 had a harrow in the barn, along with other sustainable agricultural implements. Horse drawn equipment fascinated me, as I grew up with tractors. This harrow was a frame of beams that looked like the letter A, with long metal spikes driven through it.

Another one of my early harrows was made of four beams chained to each other, also with spikes. This one jiggled a lot more, helping to break up the soil. Both of these implements did a fine job, and were made right on the farm, I imagine. They were simple, and the design was hundreds of years old.

A disc harrow has curved discs instead of teeth. It slices, which is handy for cornstalks and cover crop residue. We used a disc on our sandy loam soils in the Midwest when I was a kid, so I tried it here. That was a mistake, because the discs make clay clods and end up packing the clay soils on our Tennessee hilltops. I rarely pull a disc on our fields.

Then I found a section harrow, also called a spike-tooth harrow. I still use these. It's a metal frame with iron teeth, about four or five feet square. They are often pulled in pairs. It has a handle on it so you can set the angle of the teeth. I noticed the four corner teeth were curved on top. When the handle was pushed all of the way down, the harrow rode on these curves. When it was moved from field to field it didn't harrow the roads and pastures like the other ones.

Sometimes we just use a drag, which can be a log or a heavy piece of metal. It's good for cloddy soil, which happens if the soil is plowed when it's too wet.

Another use of the harrow is to drag it over the field a few days after planting. Before the

potatoes, corn, beans or squash emerge, many little weeds are germinating. These are taken care of by harrowing the surface, but do not disturb what we've planted. This simple procedure saves time hoeing in between the plants in the rows.

I bought a rotary hoe at an auction last winter, and have recently tried it out. it has discs with teeth that rotate as it is pulled. They say it can be pulled over the field even after the corn is up a few inches tall. I'm going to try this, but very carefully.

Plowing and harrowing leaves the ground the way I like it. Bigger clods below and only fine soil on the surface. Rototilling leaves the soil fine too deeply, and our heavy rains then pack it. Harrowed land breaks up easier after a rain. In a small garden, a rake does the job of a harrow. The less we work the soil, the better, as long as it is pulverized and loose.