

# The Roto-Ette Home Gardener

by **Charlie Zuck**  
of Elizabethtown, PA

## Home Gardener with Locke Mower

The Roto-Ette Home Gardener was the second attempt by Rototiller, Inc. to get into a market for the home gardener instead of the commercial market. Mr. Kelsey's first try was in 1938 with the Wheelbarrow Cultivator.

## Wheel Barrow Cultivator

The Wheel Barrow Cultivator was designed strictly for the home gardener, while the B machines were for commercial use. The WBC had a 1-hp engine and could till to a depth of 6". The tiller section could be removed and a reel lawnmower could be attached. The price tag was \$195, which was several hundred dollars less than any other tiller of the day. Contrary to Kelsey's thinking, sales were down, another idea before its time. Thanks to Allen Cluett for the photo of the WBC owned by the Burden Iron Works Museum in Troy, New York.

Kelsey was persistent with this idea when in 1944 ROTOTILLER made plans to get out of the commercial tiller business and devote his business entirely to the Home Gardener. This machine was comprised of 228 parts including 36 bearings. The tiller was mostly made of aluminum, which made it light enough to be used by almost anyone. The HG used a 1½-hp Briggs & Stratton engine and boasted eight different attachments. It could till, cultivate, mow the yard, make furrows for planting, saw logs, and plow snow. The basic HG cost \$330, which was not cheap, but was less than the larger tillers on the market.



Home Gardener with Locke Mower

Wheel Barrow Cultivator





Rotary Cone Mower

### Rotary Cone Mower

This HG with attached Rotary Cone Mower is located in the Burden Iron Works Museum in Troy, New York and is another example of how manufacturers tried to make their machines do many things. As is plain to see, it is quite dangerous looking at today's safety standards.



Home Gardener with Tiller Attached

### Home Gardener with Tiller Attached

The HG has two speeds forward, using a low and high gearbox on either side of the single wheel. The wheel that is used is rather unique and a problem for collectors. The tire and tube are one. It is basically a tire with a valve stem vulcanized to the tire carcass. There is no tire made to replace it, so the collector needs to be creative. Some have removed about an inch of the tire on the ID and installed a tube. Others have had the tire filled with foam, much like some skid loader owners do.

### Roto-Ette Wagon

This is a photo from the manual. Shown is a compressor and 8 gallon stainless steel tank for spraying chemicals around your home or farm. The compressor also had the option of running a paint sprayer.



Roto-Ette Wagon

The Roto-Ette trademark was created to market this tiller since the ROTOTILLER name went to Graham-Paige Motors Corporation with the rights to build the next version of the commercial B1-3, which was the B1-6 and B1-7. Kelsey, however, still did business under the ROTOTILLER, INC. name in Troy, NY.

Sales were slow at first, but by 1948 it looked like Kelsey had a winner. That was all about to change due to the debut of the front tine tiller. These "front enders" were much cheaper and by early 1949 orders for the HG dried up.

Fortunately for Kelsey, he had an ingenious chief engineer by the name of George Done, who would come to the rescue of ROTOTILLER, INC. To find out what he did, you will have to wait for my next article.

Unfortunately these tillers are not highly sought by collectors. Of all the ROTOTILLER brand tillers I collect, the Frazer B1-6 & 7 tillers are the only ones that seem in demand. Several owners of these machines have contacted me over the years and have said they still use them in tilling their gardens.

Check out the photo album on my website [www.zucksrototillers.com](http://www.zucksrototillers.com) for more photos of the Home Gardener. If anyone needs information or has questions on these tillers, I can be contacted through my email on the website listed above. 📧