

She Breeds Hair Sheep As Pets

Jeanie Funkhouser's original plan was to raise and sell Katahdin hair sheep for meat on her 7-acre farm. Instead, she ended up breeding and selling them as pets. She selects for temperament, color and parasite resistance.

"We bought three females and a male, but when we discovered their wonderful temperament, we decided to raise them for pets," says Funkhouser, who also rents her animals out for nativity scenes and petting zoos. "They walk on a leash and eat out of our hands. Sit down in their pasture and even the grown ewes will crawl into your lap. The bucks are docile as well and never try to ram or butt us."

She says the lack of wool and tails to cut and their relatively small size makes Katahdin hair sheep ideal for pets. Without the heavy wool found on other sheep breeds, she says there is no concern for fly strike (maggots).

"They don't have that woolly smell, and they are easier to care for," says Funkhouser. "Their hair gets thicker during the winter, but they shed like a dog in the spring. You just brush them out."

Funkhouser's flock has grown to 18 ewes and three rams. Her ideal is a smaller, more feminine body type rather than the stocky types desired for meat production. Her ewes range in size from 50 to 65 lbs. for smaller ones up to 130 lbs. Rams run close to 200 lbs.

"They are very good mothers and about



Jeanie Funkhouser breeds Katahdin hair sheep for breeding and sells them as pets. "They have a wonderful temperament," she says.

95 to 98 percent of offspring are twins," says Funkhouser. "Our first ram was black with a white blaze on his face. Most of his lambs are black and white."

The hair sheep will breed in either spring or fall, which works well for Funkhouser. With a limited market for pet sheep, she sells out her current crop before rebreeding. In 2011, she had a 10-lamb crop for sale, and by early 2012 she had only four left. She chose not to breed in fall 2011, but will breed her ewes this spring if all the lambs are sold.

Funkhouser recommends buyers take home a pair of lambs as they like company. She prices ewe lambs at \$200, wethers at \$150 and breeding rams at \$300.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Heavenly Heart Farm, P.O. Box 332, Edinburg, Va. 22824 (ph 540 984-3925; unicorn1@shentel.net).

Profitable Wolfberries Taste Good And Are Good For You

Don Daugs found his first wild wolfberry, or goji, plant while hunting on his friend's Utah ranch. It's presumed that the plants, which have grown in China for centuries, got started in the U.S. when Chinese transcontinental railroad workers dropped seeds or berries. The plants Daugs found were filled with tasty red berries, and he transplanted some to his garden.

That was 2004. This year, he sold \$42,000 worth of seedlings to nurseries and private growers. A 30-ft. row of bushes that he started with 15 plants nets him as much as 100 lbs. of fruit a season, which sells for \$10 to \$15/lb. for dried and up to \$30/lb. for fresh fruit. Leaves used in tea are valued as high as \$25/lb.

Daugs obtained a couple of grants for genetic and nutrient testing so he could identify the best plants for his nursery.

"The end results are that my plants are closely related to China's, and the nutrients are as good or better than plants in China," Daugs says.

Packed full of essential minerals, trace minerals, vitamins and amino acids, the berries have medicinal qualities with high antioxidant content, carotenoids, catechins and other healthful attributes that claim to reduce everything from inflammation to high blood pressure. Daugs lists the nutrients on his website and is a believer in wolfberries. He and his family faithfully eat the fruit and brew the leaves for tea.

The plants are drought resistant, require no fertilizer and thrive from "Duluth, Minn., to Hawaii (zones 3-10)". They prefer alkaline soil with a pH higher than 7. Bare root starts planted in the spring often yield fruit the first year. Wolfberries ripen from late June to first frost. The teardrop shaped berries range from orange to bright red when they are ripe.



Don Daugs sells wolfberries to nurseries and private growers. The teardrop-shaped berries range from orange to bright red when ripe.



Daugs sells bare root plants starting at \$4.50 each. He offers breaks for large orders (\$2.30/apiece for 500 or more plants). He also offers more mature plants starting at \$8 and \$11. He notes that by the third year plants have side shoots that can be started for additional plants.

His website includes nutritional and growing information and a cookbook for sale filled with wolfberry recipes.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Phoenix Tears Nursery, 1847 South 2400 West, Logan, Utah 84321 (ph 435 753-3656; www.phoenixtearsnursery.com).



Linda and Dale Black's chestnut orchard (left) is starting to produce saleable nuts. Homemade deburrer removes hulls.



Nuts drop down through 2 sets of lawn mower tires that run at different speeds to "rub" hulls off (left). Nuts are then fed into a home-built sorting machine.



Chestnut Orchard Up And Running

Linda and Dale Black's chestnut orchard is starting to produce saleable nuts. A 4,000-lb. yield in 2010 doubled in 2011 and is expected to double again in 2012 to 16,000 lbs. While yields are on the increase, so is demand for the Dunstan strain chestnuts. About half their production goes to a food store chain and half are sold over the internet.

"We have about 1,000 trees producing," says Linda Black. "The nuts were a little smaller with the drought we had last year, but we still sold out by Christmas."

What started with 100 seedlings planted on their Illinois farm in 2001 has grown to between 2,600 and 2,700 hybridized chestnut trees. Several hundred trees have been lost to deer, rabbits and other pests, even though a handmade wire cage protected each tree.

Though the couple purchased their first set of seedlings, the bulk of the orchard was direct seeded or grown from seed in a greenhouse they set up on the farm. The first few years they replanted any tree that was destroyed, but have since realized they have plenty to work with.

"We planted on 20-ft. centers, which may be too close for maximum nut production, but it's our hope that our children or grandchildren may be able to harvest some trees for wood, leaving others for nut production," says Linda.

Two homemade devices that remove the hulls or burs and sort the nuts by size were introduced this past season. Dale Black fashioned them after similar machines used by friends in the chestnut business.

Nuts drop from a hopper down through two sets of lawn mower tires. The tires are under inflated so as not to damage the nuts. Opposing tires running at different speeds "rub" the hulls or burs off the nuts.

After nuts are separated from the burs, they are fed into a sorter. Dale laminated plywood rings to make a frame for a cylinder. Three sheets of high-density polyethylene, each one drilled to make holes of a slightly larger size, were mounted inside the rings. The cylinder rides on wheels mounted on top of a framework fashioned out of shelving uprights.

A hose mounted inside the cylinder spirals from one end to the other, helping to move the nuts along. As they pass over each succeeding section of the cylinder, nuts fall through into

wooden containers, separating out into small, medium and large sizes.

The nuts in each size group are poured into a food grade sterilizing solution. Here the good nuts sink, while those with air in the shells float. The nuts are then dried, packaged and put in cold storage.

This past season, nuts were picked from the ground by hand and moved by hand from one machine to another. In the near future, the Blacks hope to mechanize handling with augers and conveyers. This winter they purchased a used nut harvester from California.

Finding customers for their fresh chestnuts has been easier than finding equipment. Imported chestnuts can spend days or weeks in transit, exposing them to temperature extremes. As a result, imported nut quality varies.

"We work extremely hard to get farm-fresh chestnuts to the market under proper conditions," says Linda. "Within seven days of hitting the ground, our chestnuts have been deburred, sorted, cleaned, sanitized, packaged labeled and refrigerated before traveling to a refrigerated warehouse."

The Black's chestnut orchard requires limited work now that the trees are established. Linda advises fertilizing with a light treatment of urea or 12/12/12. She cautions against over fertilizing, which can cause the trees to shoot up too fast.

The American chestnut mostly died out due to blight. Crossing the few American survivors with Chinese chestnuts and recrossing with the American are bringing the trees back. The Dunstan was an early success.

"The Dunstan is supposed to be 15/16 American chestnut, and most of our trees are the classic American tall, straight shape," she says. "However, the Dunstan nuts are larger than the American chestnut was, sweeter and easier to peel."

Though the 2011 crop is sold out, pricing and pictures are available on the farm's website.

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