

## World Class Peony Growers

If you love peonies, check out Swenson Gardens in Howard Lake, Minn. These world class growers specialize in the “old fashioned” fragrant blooms with eye-catching new colors like yellow, coral, lavender and fire engine red along with the traditional red, pink and white blooms.

“We market 125 different varieties each year, and it changes. These aren’t your grandma’s peonies,” says Keith Swenson of the more than 15,000 plants at the business he and his wife, Becky, started in 2002. Besides coming in an array of colors and bloom shapes, the new hybrid varieties stand tall and strong, without staking. When they aren’t blooming, many varieties with shrub-like bushes add landscaping beauty.

The Swenson family grows peonies the old-fashioned way in rich, chemical-free soil. And, instead of selling less developed tissue cultured plants, they sell bare rootstock from divided mature plants.

“This means you get a more developed plant and impressive results in your garden faster,” Swenson notes. Growing the plants in Zone 4 offers a big advantage as the plants survive to 40 degrees below zero, but they’re suitable for Zones 2 to 8, anywhere

that winter is cold enough for the plants to go dormant.

The Swensons hold open houses a couple of weekends in early June when the peonies bloom so customers can see them before ordering them for fall shipment. (Photos of the varieties are also on the website).

“We have blooms for seven weeks,” Swenson says. “We encourage gardeners to plant different varieties with different bloom times.”

He emphasizes the importance of properly preparing the soil with composted manure, bone meal, Milorganite and other amendments to create a well-drained, fertilized site in a location that gets at least 8 hrs. of sun a day.

“If you do, you never have to fertilize again,” Swenson says, and like grandma’s peonies they will bloom for decades. “The less attention you pay to them the better they grow. Peonies are also drought and deer-resistant, and very disease-free as long as the site is not wet all the time.”

The Swensons sell four classifications of peonies: Garden varieties, Distinctive peonies, Intersectional peonies (tree and herbaceous peony cross), and Collector peonies that range from \$20 to \$250.



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He credits his mentor Roger Anderson, of Ft. Atkinson, Wis., who spent years developing peony varieties.

“Roger retired, and we are trying to carry on his hybrids. It’s imperative for me to pass them on to our children,” Swenson says.

The Swensons’ children have already

started sideline businesses. Britta sells new blooms as cut flowers, and Luke cares for honeybees.

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## Her Percherons Earn Their Room, Board

Draft horse owners come up with some creative ways for the animals to earn their keep – and to give them more time with their beloved animals.

That’s what Pam and Dale Wolle of Battle Ground, Wash., decided to do in 2004. Pam thought it would be fun to own a carriage to use as their 12 grandchildren got married. Then they met a Seattle businesswoman who provided horse-drawn carriage services and was willing to share what she knew.

“It was something fun for my husband and I to do,” Wolle says. When he passed away two years ago, she decided to continue to run Daybreak Percherons, along with her full-time promotional marketing job.

“The carriage business pays for my horse habit,” she explains. “I do it because I love it, but I wouldn’t want to do it fulltime.”

With an inventory of reproduction white and black Victorian carriages, and a 14 to 16-person people-mover that transforms into a covered wagon, she can offer a variety of services.

For weddings and events, she dresses up in a black tailored suit and lady’s English riding hat to drive the bride to the ceremony. Then she takes the bride and groom for a ride and photo shoot before delivering them to the reception. She offers romantic “proposal” rides and has been honored to ride as a “squire” for a horse lover’s last ride to the cemetery.

Towns and groups hire her to transport people at various events, from annual Christmas celebrations to anniversary and historical reenactments. Often banks and other businesses pay the sponsorships.

“Do your research,” she suggests. “Find out all your costs – including insurance.”

Then don’t be afraid to charge accordingly. Considering it costs \$200 to shoe a draft horse, plus the cost of hauling them to an event, their feed, insurance and other maintenance costs, she came up with a \$400 fee for her wedding package. That just covers costs, she says. If she wanted to make a profit, she would need to charge more.

She made brochures and business cards



Pam and Dale Wolle operate a popular horse-drawn carriage service called Daybreak Percherons.

to give to wedding and event planners and funeral directors. She markets through her website and word of mouth.

Preparation is key to a successful business. Wolle knows exactly where she will park and the route she will take with the horse and carriage. She contacts clients a week ahead of the event to give them specific details – and reassure them she is dependable. She is always on time with everything sparkling clean.

Most importantly, she works with her horses to ensure they will be calm amid popping balloons, blowing horns and big groups of people.

“If it’s not safe for the horse, it’s not safe for you,” she says.

Wolle books about 12 events a year, which she says is ideal for her.

“I feel very blessed to have such wonderful horses and be among great people in the draft horse community,” she says. “I love sharing my horses with the public.”

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Carol Herden is the world’s largest producer of cattle figurines. She also creates sculptures of horses, sheep and hogs.



## Artist Created Worldwide Business Making Livestock Figurines

If you’re looking for a farm-related gift or trophy, check out the website of Carol Herden, the world’s largest producer of cattle figurines.

Herden doesn’t just paint figurines from a purchased mold. She makes the clay sculpture, creates the mold, and pours the casting with a resin-based media called cold cast porcelain. The resulting sculpture isn’t delicate like porcelain, but it’s not a toy either.

Herden has created calf, cow and bull models for 35 breeds of cattle. Some are limited editions (molds were broken). As livestock breeders around the world have discovered her talents, she has created sculptures of horses, sheep and hogs. Plus, she engraves leather, metal, wood and ceramic tile with livestock, wildlife and farm-related themes.

“Everyone knows me for cattle,” Herden says. She grew up on a Montana beef ranch and sculpted her first cows when she was in junior high. While studying art in college, she worked at a local bronze foundry and learned how to make molds.

She is a regular vendor at the World Dairy Expo in Wisconsin, where cattle owners buy up her figurines. Some give her photos to custom paint figurines to match their live cattle. Others are willing to spend more to have her make a new sculpture, posed and painted like their animal.

Herden also makes figurines for companies and associations to give as awards or gifts. For example, she painted a world map design on a Holstein bull to replicate the marketing theme for World Wide Sires, a bovine

genetics company.

There’s also a trend by associations to create large traveling trophies for winners, and Herden has designed them for all types of livestock. Some of her clients include manufacturers such as Breyer, which commissioned her to sculpt nine pieces for its Western series between 1996 and 2002.

Her swine figurines are among her newest, and she was pleased to hear praise from a couple of producers at the World Pork Show in Des Moines, who said her Duroc boar was the best they had seen.

Figurines are mounted on wooden bases that her husband makes. Sizes vary, but typical bases are 6 by 11-in. Figurines range from \$50 to \$500.

“I’m always game for a new venture,” Herden says. Her biggest and most challenging sculpture to date was a one-third-size fiberglass Jersey cow custom made as a serving cart for The Inn at Little Washington, a four-star Inn located near the nation’s capitol.

She would love to be commissioned to design large bronze monuments, but meanwhile she stays very busy making livestock figurines and engraving tractors and other rural related items.

In addition to her website store, Herden is opening a shop called Time Flies in Amboy, Minn., this year.

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