

Parched Green Wheat Fetches A Premier Price

Anthony and Carol Boutard harvest wheat about a month early at Ayers Creek Farm in Gaston, Ore., and then invest propane, labor and time to process it into parched green wheat that sells for as much as \$9/lb. to local restaurant owners.

Called Freekeh, Anthony Boutard says parched green wheat has been a staple of Arabic culture for centuries. Like other ancient grains, it has seen a recent resurgence. Chefs interested in adding new flavors and textures to their menu appreciate the grain's smoky, slightly sweet "with a hint of grassiness" flavor and tender texture that has a bit of a pop when chewed.

Ayers Creek Farm, which is certified organic, processes between 1,000 and 1,500 lbs. of parched green wheat each year, in addition to growing hull-less barley, milling corn, chickpeas, dry beans, and soy as well as fruits and vegetables on 140 acres.

"Wheat and barley provide a valuable rotation crop in our mix of vegetables and legumes. We grow an old race of soft red winter wheat. It's a long-straw wheat, growing about 3 to 4 ft. tall. For us, the tall stalks are easy and efficient to harvest by hand, and the abundant straw adds organic matter to the soil," Boutard says. He adds that though heritage varieties are good candidates for parching, most any wheat will work.

The challenge is timing.

"To get the perfect texture and underlying grassiness, the wheat is harvested at the green stage when the endosperm is moving from milk to the soft dough stage. We squeeze the kernel between the thumb

and forefinger, and if just a drop of milky endosperm is released, it is the perfect time," he explains. "There is a critical harvest window of 72 hrs. or so. Then the texture becomes doughy, and the flavor shifts to that of mature grain."

After the wheat heads are hand harvested, they are burned with a propane weed burner, which stops the sugar from turning to starch and adds a smoky flavor. After threshing, the wheat is placed on wire trays for about two weeks until the grain dries. It's a challenge to dry the moist wheat without it molding, Boutard notes. Fans blow through the trays to keep the air moving.

"The process we follow is based on a carefully researched and well-illustrated article in the academic journal *Economic Botany*. It details the process used by the traditional green wheat parchers in Lebanon and Jordan. Over time, we have made a few adaptations necessary for our climate, but we have always kept the integrity of the final product in mind. It is a craft and rewards the farmer who takes the time and has the patience to do it right," he says.

Even if people aren't interested in marketing parched green wheat, Boutard encourages people to plant a small patch and parch the heads with a plumber's torch. Before drying it he suggests eating some of it fresh.

"It's a treat to eat but we never sell it fresh because it's prone to molding even when refrigerated," Boutard says. "It is cooked like pasta or sweet corn, using plenty of water and boiled until the desired tenderness, about 20 to 30 min."



Anthony and Carol Boutard harvest wheat about a month early and then process it into parched green wheat, selling it for as much as \$9 per lb. to local restaurants.



Squeeze the wheat kernel between your thumb and forefinger, and if just a drop of milky endosperm is released it's time to harvest (left). After threshing, wheat is burned with propane and then placed on wire trays for 2 weeks until it dries.



Weed burner is used to add a smoky flavor to wheat.

The dried parched green wheat from the farm ends up on plates in Middle Eastern, Italian, French and Japanese restaurants as well as in business class bento boxes for Delta airline flights from Portland to Tokyo.

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There's no telling how many gallons of cider Leonard Good has made since he first built this press in 1974. People give him a quarter share of their cider as "payment".

Good Press Makes Great Cider

Leonard Good's shop-built press makes such great cider that he doesn't even need his own apples. People give him a quarter share of their cider just for the use of his press.

"One man brought a pickup load of apples 2 days in a row, and we made 300 gal. of cider," recalls Good. "With the help of a couple of teenagers, we can make about 15 gal. of cider an hour."

There is no telling how many gallons of cider Good has made since he first built the press in 1974.

"The baskets that catch the pulp and hold it for pressing are original, as is the crusher," says Good. "I did have to rebuild the press disc. I started with 2 plywood layers each 1/2 in. thick, and it lasted a year. Then I used 3 pieces, and it lasted 3 years. I

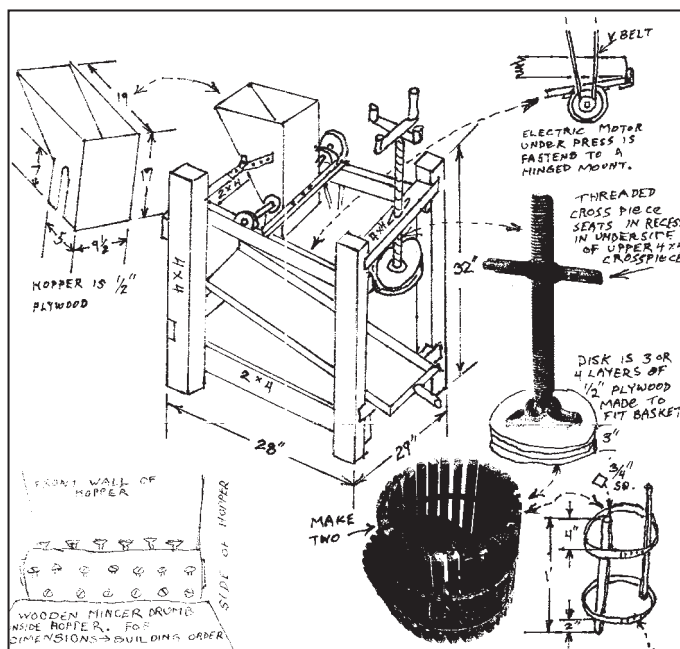
went to 4 pieces, and it has lasted ever since."

Good didn't have any plans to work from beyond a book on crushing grapes for wine. "I used all salvaged parts other than about \$5 worth of screws," says Good.

He designed a frame 28 by 29 in. in size with a height of about 30 in. It has an apple hopper to the left and a press on the right. A slanted tray with 2-in. rails mounted about 10 to 12 in. off the ground holds the pulp baskets. It has room for one being filled and a second one being pressed. A pipe in the lower end drains pressed cider into containers.

"I have 2 sieves that fit on top of gallon milk jugs to filter out the pulp," says Good.

To pulp the apples, Good decided to use a wooden shaft studded with screws. As the apples fall to the bottom of the hopper, the screw heads tear them apart.



He had a motor, complete with a driveshaft and sheave, salvaged from an old clothes dryer for power. For the press itself, Good used a 1 1/2-in. dia., 2 1/2-ft. long threaded rod with a plate at one end. Good mounted it through a threaded crosspiece that seats in a recess in the underside of the upper crosspiece in the frame. The 4-layer plywood press disk attaches to the bottom end.

To fabricate the pulp baskets, Good calculated the diameter needed to match the press plate. He started with steel bands for

hoops and 3/4-in. square mahogany and fir strips. "I didn't need bottoms, as the baskets filled with pulp just slide back and forth on the shelf."

Good indicates he would be willing to draw up more detailed plans should a FARM SHOW reader want to build his own press.

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