

Growing Mistletoe A Rewarding Sideline Business

Garret Huggins says that when he was a kid he came up with the idea to sell mistletoe as a way to raise money for Boy Scouts. He and others went door-to-door selling wreaths and mistletoe with a simple red bow. The experience was so rewarding and successful that he decided to try the venture again several years later.

"My job situation wasn't the best about a decade ago, so I sold mistletoe outside of shopping centers and at my dad's Christmas tree lot," Huggins says. "That gave me enough money for a wonderful Christmas, and every year since I've put my heart and soul into this part-time business."

Huggins and his wife now operate Genuine Oregon Mistletoe, selling more than 10,000 bundles of the holiday item every year. Initially their business grew by word-of-mouth sales, but recently they developed a website to gain wider exposure.

"Mistletoe isn't a crop that a person cultivates or grows in a field," Huggins says. "It's a parasitic plant that grows around and up into large mature trees. I climbed into the trees or used a ladder to harvest it initially, and also used a shotgun to shoot off branches." Now he borrows his uncle's boom truck to reach up and around mature trees to gather the vining crop.

Huggins says mistletoe is difficult to handle because it's fragile, gets moldy, and its leaves can get sunburned during a



Garret Huggins and his wife sell more than 10,000 bundles of mistletoe every year.

drought. "The crop is time sensitive just like Christmas trees, so we have to have product available when the market wants it." After the plants are harvested from a tree, they separate and select the sprigs, interweave holly with them, and then tie them into tiny bundles, which are delivered to their regular customers and also sold online.

"This isn't the type of business a person can get into quickly and hope to succeed and make a killing financially," says Huggins. "There's a lot of time and hard work involved. The end product, however, brings a lot of joy and holiday smiles. That's what's really rewarding and has been since we started." For pricing check out Huggin's website or contact him via email.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Genuine Oregon Mistletoe (ph 503 863-9939; oregonmistletoe@yahoo.com; www.oregonmistletoe.com).

Mini Dairy Goats Catching On Fast

"Dwarf breed dairy goats excel in the show ring and on the milk stand," says Carla Kirby, goat breeder at Wingin' It Farms in North Carolina. Their smaller size also makes it easier for children, seniors and people with disabilities to handle them.

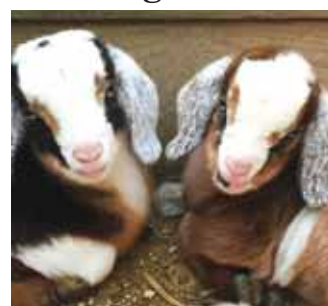
Because they produce 2/3 to 3/4 the milk that standard dairy goats produce and only eat about half as much feed, miniature goats are ideal for families with small acreages that just want enough milk for their own use. They also take up less room and are easier on terrain.

All miniature goat breeds start with a Nigerian Dwarf (17 to 21 in. tall) bred to a standard dairy goat.

"Genetics and management play important roles in milk production. The influence of Nigerian Dwarf genetics may help with the increase of butterfat in the milk miniature dairy goats produce," Kirby says. High butterfat results in a rich, creamy milk to drink or make into cheese, ice cream, yogurt and butter. Goat milk is also often used to make soap.

The standard for miniatures is that they are at least 2 in. shorter than the minimum height requirement for the standard breed of the parent. For example, mini Nubians range from 24 to 28 in. compared to standard Nubians that start at 30 in. Weights average 120 to 130 lbs. for the minis and 200 lbs. for the standards.

While Nubian/Nigerian crosses are common, goat breeders have crossed



Mini Nubian dairy goats are ideal for families with small acreages who just want enough milk for their own use, says Carla Kirby.

Nigerian Dwarfs with a variety of standard dairy goats to create many minis - Alpine, Guernsey, LaMancha, Nubian, Saanen, Toggenburg and Oberhasli, for example.

Kirby raises standard and mini LaMancha goats that are distinct with very tiny ears.

Minatures pricing starts at around \$300, depending on breed, quality and generation.

Kirby and Wilcox belong to the Miniature Dairy Goat Association (www.miniaturedairygoats.net), which has more than 1,000 members.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Carla Kirby (www.winginifarms.com; winginifarms@gmail.com) or Jacqui Wilcox (daystarsfarm@daystarsfarm.com; www.daystarsfarm.com).



Ancona ducks are white-spotted with a single color, which can be anything from black to silver to lavender.

Ever Considered Ancona Ducks?

If you raise Ancona ducks, Amy McKamey would like your support in her quest to have them officially recognized by the American Poultry Association (APA). And if you've never heard of them, McKamey encourages you to consider them.

"They're different, and they stand out from other breeds of ducks," she says. The white ducks are spotted with one single color - everything from black to silver to lavender.

McKamey has raised ducks since she was in 4-H. She and her husband raise heritage livestock on their Heritage Meadows Farm in Indiana. Anconas are among their 5 duck breeds.

"Ancona is the top seller because they are interesting for people who want backyard birds," she says. "No two are alike, so they can distinguish each bird."

Anconas are medium-size ducks. They are good egg layers and meat birds, and do well in both cold and heat.

"They are active, good foragers and even-tempered," McKamey says. "Ours are on pasture year-round. We have shelter for them from the wind, but by choice they would rather be outside."

She believes the breed should have

official recognition and has begun the lengthy process with the APA, starting with Ancona ducks with black spots. Research indicates that the breed started in 1913 in the U.S. Ancona ducks earned two first place awards at a Boston show in 1915.

To get APA recognition, McKamey has begun the process of setting standards, setting up shows, and gathering support.

"I encourage anyone who breeds and shows Anconas to contact me. We need to collect many records of these birds at shows to move forward with the next step of the application," she says, acknowledging there are many more steps and years of work to obtain APA recognition. Another easy way to support the cause is to join the Facebook group Ancona Ducks.

The U.S. breed should be acknowledged, she says.

"Ancona ducks are ideal for homesteading," she says.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Heritage Meadows Farm, 1692 E. Co. Rd. 800 S, Clayton, Ind. 46118 (ph 317 539-2489; www.heritagemeadowsfarm.net; amy@heritagemeadowsfarm.net; Facebook - Ancona ducks).

Dehydrating Tomatoes Started California Family Business

In 1985, when Karen Cox dried her first batches of tomatoes in a couple of small dehydrators, she had no idea they would start a sideline business for her and her husband, Bill, who raised tomatoes for canneries. Friends loved the rich tomato flavor, and a local buyer purchased them as fast as Karen could dry them.

Now, 35 years later, the California business, which was named Karen's Naturals after she died in 2009, continues to sell dried tomatoes as well as dried apples and persimmons along with a variety of freeze-dried items.

"Everything we dry is all natural. There's nothing added - no salt, sulfur or preservatives," says Bill Cox, noting that those additives are typically used in sun drying and dehydrating processes.

But the process has become more sophisticated and less labor intensive with a 60 by 100-ft. shop set up with a flow-through dehydrator. Washed, sliced tomatoes go in one end on the 4-ft. wide screen/belt and come out dried 40 ft. and 8 hrs. later.

"We pick 60 buckets (30 lbs. each) of tomatoes a day over 6 weeks," Cox says. About a dozen seasonal workers take care of production and packaging.

The tomatoes are just a small part of the current operation. Cox purchases bins of apples and persimmons from other California farmers. They are sliced like French fries and dried in the same way. Because there is great demand for it, he also purchased freeze-dried items such as berries and vegetables like corn and peas and repackages them to sell with his produce.

"They can all be stored at room temperature as long as they are sealed," Cox says.



Bill Cox has been selling dried tomatoes and apples, along with a variety of freeze-dried items, since 1985.

Most of the items are sold through sales reps throughout the country to medium-to high-end cooperatives and markets and restaurants. Consumers can purchase them through Karen's Naturals online store.

Though most of the farm's tomatoes are sold to a cannery, dehydrating some of them along with other foods is a good addition to the business.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Karen's Naturals, P.O. Box 807, Westley, Calif. 95387 (ph 800 537-1985; www.shopkarensnaturals.com; info@karensnaturals.net).