

“Black Oak Holler” Hogs Bred For Flavor

Chuck Talbot’s pigs are bred to fatten on acorns and other scrounged material found in the woods near Black Oak Holler, West Virginia. He has crossed Ossabaw hogs with Large Blacks for his paternal line and now has added Eurasian Wild Boar to the mix.

“The Eurasian Wild Boar potential is exciting for its ability to put on fat in the woods,” explains Talbot. “Like the Ossabaw, these aren’t just wild breeds. They are feral breeds with old, heritage genetics that put on fat.”

Unlike many states, West Virginia has no rules on breeding Wild Boar. The state actually released them at one time as a way to restore former strip mines.

“They make an excellent maternal line with good productivity and mothering,” says Talbot.

The males that result from breeding the wild boar to an Ossabaw/Large Black cross sow are a little more docile than their father. “I didn’t let anybody in his pen,” he says. “We come and go around these two, although you always need to watch boars. We separate them before working them.”

A former professor at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, Talbot is trying to establish a swine production system for small farmers in the mountains of West Virginia. His goal is a pig that can survive in the woods, feeding on acorns and hickory nuts in the fall to produce a flavorful meat.

This summer he put 30 head in a 16-acre woodlot with double strand electric fence. Last year he ran 100 head in the woods. He runs the pigs in sorghum Sudan pasture in the summer and supplements with barley.

“Europeans say our farm-produced pork is bland due to corn and soybean rations,”



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Keeping the pigs contained in their forest pasture starts with training as piglets, notes Talbot’s wife Nadine Perry. “We have a couple fields with woven wire and electric wire on the inside,” she says. “We train new pigs that way.”

Talbot adds that the daily barley supplement also helps. “When I whoop and holler, they know something good is coming,” he says. “That is part of the conditioning, but they also respect the 6,000 volts.”

Talbot’s pigs are not the fast growing, “other white meat” pigs produced in confinement. His are ready for slaughter at a year’s age, give or take a month. They weigh in at around 350 lbs.

“We’re working with a group in the state

to expand and upgrade meat processing,” says Perry. “We are trying to expand processing and dry curing for more products. If we could get dry cured product done locally, we could slice it and package it.”

Perry says the crossing of feral and domestic breeds combined with the barley and forest feed make for a flavorful meat. It is also lower in saturated fat.

“The flavor is fantastic with a sweeter taste and more depth,” she says. “It has a darker color, and there are more layers to the flavor with a richness you don’t get with conventional pork.”

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Mini Easy-To-Access DIY Greenhouse

We spotted a clever DIY greenhouse on the internet that appears to be an easy way to extend the growing season. The design is posted at www.swingncocoa.blogspot.com. Click on “covered greenhouse” for photos and step-by-step instructions to build the 4 by 8-ft. structure. The 2 by 12 wooden frame includes a chicken wire bottom to avoid mole and gopher issues.

The 1/2-in. pvc arches are beefed up with woven wire secured by electrical tape, before covering them with plastic or breathable garden fabric.

With hinges on one end, the early season greenhouse transforms into a raised bed garden by simply lifting the other end to open



Mini greenhouse converts into a raised bed garden by lifting structure’s hinged end.



it. It can be lowered whenever the weather is bad or to extend the season.

Fitted with a hose adapter in the frame,

the greenhouse is set up for an automatic watering system with a soaker hose.