

Garlic Grower Saves Her Best To Replant

Jean Stremlo never sells her best garlic. Those bulbs are carefully set aside at mid-summer harvest to be replanted in the fall. But with 5,500 plants in the ground this spring, there will still be plenty to sell.

"I save back the cream of the crop, as they are the ones best acclimated to our soils and weather," says Stremlo. "The bigger the cloves you plant, the bigger the cloves you harvest."

Stremlo's garlic has had to work hard to acclimate recently. She raised garlic for years on top of a mountain at the northern edge of the Catskills in New York State. After her father died, she and her husband, Rodney, moved to her home farm in Middlesex County, New Jersey to help her sister care for their mother.

She brought 7 unique heirloom varieties with her. She and her family now operate Brook Hollow Farm, their farm-to-market business.

They sell garlic at several farmers' markets as well as from Stremlo's home. Garlic is sold as single bulbs, in braids, and in packs of multiples. Braids are decorated with wheat straw and other material.

"My sister is into arts and crafts and designs the braids," says Stremlo. "They are popular as home decorations as well as gifts."

Moving to an old farm whose fields had been in hay for decades was a challenge.

"We knew we would need at least a year of amending the hay fields and planting cover crops before we could begin to use them for garlic," says Stremlo.

Pacific Gold mustard is one of the cover crops. She plants it for its ability to control nematodes that attack garlic.

Disease and pest control is another reason Stremlo prefers to replant her own garlic. "Some of the infestations you can get from other farms can be devastating," says Stremlo. "It can be tempting when you see a new garlic to buy it and plant it, but you need to be careful. Know who the grower is and how they grow it. Once the pest is in your soil, it's there for good."

Before the garlic is planted in the fall, a layer of compost is tilled into the beds. The compost is a mix of shredded leaves, manure from nearby horse and alpaca farms, and food waste.

Once the garlic cloves have been planted, the beds are covered with 4 to 6-in. of mulch to keep it from heaving out of the ground. The mulch also holds back weeds while feeding the soil life.

"Garlic is such a rewarding crop," says Stremlo. "When they first pop up, you may see gaps, but over time they all grow."

She explains that the major growth in the spring is building the plant. Bulb growth is primarily in the final month before harvest.

"Pick them a week early and you can lose

a quarter of the harvest," says Stremlo.

She digs her garlic when about half of the leaves have died back. Each leaf is responsible for a layer of paper like tissue over the bulb. Two layers can be lost cleaning the bulb and another when transporting it.

"I like to have three to four layers on the bulb when selling it," says Stremlo. "You want the layers intact or you have a shorter shelf life."

Stremlo grows mostly hard-neck garlic as they are easy to peel, although they don't store as well as the soft neck garlic that she raises for braiding. She also likes the hard-neck types for their flavor.

"Some are better for baking, while others are best in salads and raw," says Stremlo. "Some are robust and others spicy and hot. I try to grow varieties that are not found locally."

While she sells all her garlic as whole bulbs, Stremlo processes some for personal use and as gifts for family and friends. "I slice the cloves and dry them in a dehydrator," she says. "Then I pulverize them into a powder and bottle it."

Stremlo has found an outlet for garlic scapes, which most gardeners cut off and discard. The scape is the flower head of the plant, and it is believed that removing it puts more energy into the bulb.

"We clip them and sell to an Asian market," says Stremlo. "The tender parts are good in



Jean Stremlo with some of her garlic bulbs. She and her sister sell garlic at several farmers' markets as well as from Stremlo's home.

stir fries and soups."

Stremlo is experimenting with a few plants each year, letting the seed heads form. She harvests the tiny cloves and plants them in the fall. The next year the bulb that forms, though small, can be replanted as cloves in the fall.

"This is my third year trying this, and they popped up faster than others from the same variety," says Stremlo. "I think they are even more acclimated to our soils."

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Yak/Angus Cross Ideal For High Elevations

University of Wyoming researcher Mark Stayton is adding Yak genes to Angus to better tolerate high altitudes. Conventional cattle breeds often contract brisket disease at altitudes above 6,000 ft. Stayton thinks one answer is to crossbreed them with yaks native to Tibet.

"Yaks live on the Tibetan plateau with an average elevation of 14,500 ft.," says Stayton. "They have multiple mechanisms to provide altitude resistance. We are trying to capture some of them to give our cattle a few thousand feet more resistance."

Stayton explains that as North American beef breeds have been bred up for increased meat production, they appear to have become more sensitive to high altitudes. Bovine high-mountain disease or brisket disease is the result. Arteries in the lungs close off in cattle at high altitudes. As blood pressure builds, unable to push blood through the lungs, fluid collects around the lungs, and cattle die of congestion of the lung or pneumonia. In humans, a similar condition is pulmonary hypertension.

"In the past, we looked for the disease at altitudes of 6,000 ft. or higher, but as cattle have become blockier over the years, the problem altitude appears to be creeping lower," says Stayton.

Yaks lack the hyper sensitive reaction. Stayton, an associate professor of Molecular Biology, suspects that fewer genes are involved in it than in other altitude resistant mechanisms. He has crossbred Angus cows with Yak semen to produce a first generation cross. This summer, crossbred heifers will be taken to high elevations and tested for pulmonary pressure.

"The most resistant will be bred back to Angus bulls and the quarter-yak heifer calves again tested and selected for



University of Wyoming researcher Mark Stayton is crossbreeding Angus cattle with Yaks to increase tolerance at high elevations. Photo shows first generation cross calves.

resistance," says Stayton. "Eventually we hope to breed out all the yak DNA except for resistance."

When the traditional crossbreeding and selection reaches the third or fourth generation, Stayton will begin using a high tech approach. Bioinformatics will be used to analyze and compare each animal's DNA with mapped genomes of yak and bovine.

"This will let us identify the regions of the genome we are selecting for, as certain DNA sequences are more prevalent in later generations," he explains.

The reason Stayton is attempting to eliminate most yak DNA is to maintain bovine productivity. Yaks are slower growing, are smaller, and mature a year or two after bovines. They are heavily horned and have a long outer coat and a more wool-like undercoat.

"Meat processors don't like to deal with the heavy hair coat, which tends to get matted," says Stayton.

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Goat Grazing Franchise

The number of rental goat operations is growing across the country. With 13 years experience, Tammy Dunakin is taking the concept to a new level, offering franchises as part of her Rent-A-Ruminant LLC.

"After stories were written about our operations, I got inquiries from people all over asking how to do this business. I realized I could help other people get started," says Dunakin, recalling her progression from renting out 10 goats on the island of Vashon, Wash., to her full-time business with 120 goats rented out mostly in the Seattle area.

Her entrepreneurial journey began when she had an "ah ha" moment that her two goats seemed bored and "needed a job". She didn't realize renting goats for grazing was already being done when she started looking for work on the island in 2004. She gradually grew the business and expanded the herd to 60 before taking jobs off the island, specifically in the Seattle area, where her business became very successful.

Through the years of building her Rent-A-Ruminant business, Dunakin had lean years and made mistakes. But she also learned about marketing, necessary paperwork, the best fencing, and sources for equipment and insurance. More recently, she researched licensing and worked with a company on setting up a franchise, which she started in 2016.

Dunakin offers an operation manual and her personal mentoring, training and ongoing support. Franchise members receive PowerPoint presentations and materials helpful for marketing, connections with vendors, and opportunities to subcontract with her as well as a page on the Rent-A-Ruminant website.

She will work with businesses to identify strong markets in their area such as wildfire prevention, and management of brush around retention ponds, airports, schools, and private and corporate properties. In Seattle,



Tammy Dunakin is taking the concept of goat rentals to a new level by offering franchises.

Dunakin's rented goats have become a tool for law enforcement by eating brush in areas known for drug problems or where burglars can hide.

Dunakin points out that once a goat rental business starts, it generally snowballs because of media attention and residents seeing – and liking – the goats. Often goats are rented multiple times in an area as maintenance, and people learn the goats' names and become attached to them.

Dunakin has two franchise owners, one in Texas and the other in Tennessee. She invites anyone interested in learning more about becoming part of the franchise to contact her. She notes that currently she is offering a greatly reduced franchise fee, but it will go up as the franchise becomes more established.

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