

## New Apple Varieties Discovered By Growing Trees From Seed

By Jim Ruen, Contributing Editor

Doug Shefelbine has beaten the odds twice when developing desirable new apple varieties from seed. It only took him 27 years and tens of thousands of seedlings.

"From the 10,000 trees I planted from seed, one was exceptional," says Shefelbine. "I have about 25,000 to 30,000 trees that range from new seedlings a foot high to full-size trees that are 20 years old."

Apple seeds are genetic storehouses. Planting a seed from one variety does not produce a tree of that variety. To get an orchard of Honeycrisp apples, you graft scion wood from a Honeycrisp to rootstock. Cross-pollinating 2 varieties increases the chance that you will get a seed with desirable characteristics of the two, but doesn't guarantee it.

Shefelbine is a second-generation apple grower in southwestern Wisconsin. Initially he tried hand-crossing varieties, which was a time consuming effort.

"I did about 1,200 hand crosses, and none turned out, so I decided to just plant seeds," says Shefelbine. "It was easy to do and didn't cost a lot."

He plants them close together, creating hedgerows of young seedlings. To increase his odds of success, Shefelbine started planting only seeds from the extremely popular Honeycrisp. He hoped to get the texture and juice that variety is known for, but something even better.

So far he has patented 2 varieties that he

has licensed to a variety developer. Pazazz is about 20 years old. It has been in commercial development for about 10 years and is now reaching the market.

Shefelbine describes it as having a sweet, tart flavor that is better than Honeycrisp, but retains its juice and texture. The other variety is called RiverBelle. Both are exceptional, but each also has shortcomings.

"Pazazz has to be picked at just the right time and then kept in controlled storage," says Shefelbine.

That hasn't slowed its adoption. It is now being planted commercially from Nova Scotia to Peru. Shefelbine doesn't expect that kind of interest from RiverBelle.

"People love the flavor of RiverBelle, but it has cosmetic problems and will never be a commercial orchard variety," he says. "It should do well as a roadside apple stand, though."

The problem, he explains, is that RiverBelle isn't uniform from year to year. It can be odd shaped and can crack around the stem if it gets too ripe. An early season apple, it also doesn't keep as well as Pazazz.

At 79, Shefelbine continues to plant seeds and to comb the young trees grown from seed for exceptional fruit. He spends 3 to 4 hrs. a day in late summer and fall walking the seedling orchard, tasting and evaluating apples. He also invites his pick-your-own customers to try some of the experimentals.

Ones with promise go into the cooler for



**Doug Shefelbine has spent years trying to develop new apple varieties from seed. He plants the seeds close together, creating hedgerows of young trees.**

longer-term evaluation. "I have apples from 25 trees in the cooler," says Shefelbine. "I will sample them once a month. To be selected, they need to taste good months down the road."

Shefelbine has other varieties at different stages of development. One numbered variety is being evaluated by a group of 50 growers. Another he describes as a very good apple ripens the 20th of August.

"I save a lot of seeds from this one to replant," says Shefelbine. "I have another that is a super good keeper and would be a 12-month apple. It is juicy, but with a denser texture than Pazazz."

Some of his selections look good, but

ripen too slowly for Shefelbine's zone 4 area. Another can be sliced and left on a windowsill for months without turning brown. Still another one produces small crab-type apples and may have a value as a new type of rootstock.

"Every seed in every apple is different," says Shefelbine. "I'm surprised that I've found as many as I have. I have 5 or 6 that I feel are better than what is on the commercial market today."

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## Rent Out Farm Sites To Campers

You can turn a pretty spot on your farm into a moneymaker with the help of Tentrr.com. The online service offers landowners a way to make some extra cash by renting out tent sites.

"Anyone can list a spot as a Backcountry site at no cost," says Baxter Townsend, Tentrr, Inc. "Campers wanting to rent a site pay no membership or access fee. They simply pay the site rental to Tentrr. Land owners receive a percentage of the rental rate they have set."

When a Tentrr user reserves a Backcountry site, the land owner receives 90 percent of the nightly rate and 80 percent of any extras the user chooses. The average price of a Backcountry site listed on Tentrr is \$35.

Signature Sites offer campers a more luxurious setting and earn an average nightly rate of \$135. Tentrr delivers and installs a fully equipped campsite. Components include a wood platform, a canvas wall tent, and a queen-size bunk bed. Other items include a wood stove, picnic table, Adirondack chairs, firepit, grill, camp toilet, sun-heated shower and dry storage.

"Signature Site CampKeepers pay a one-time fee of \$6,500," notes Townsend. "They earn 80 percent of the nightly rate, plus 80 percent of any extras reserved by the camper."

Extras for Backcountry sites might include similar components, but are provided by the CampKeeper. Other extras at either Backcountry or Signature Sites could include canoe or kayak rental if the site is on water, firewood, fresh produce or even a guided hike. Fees for extras are up to the CampKeeper.

Tentrr has gone from 24 sites in New York at the end of 2015 to 369 sites in 12



**An online service called Tentrr offers land owners a way to make extra cash by renting out tent sites.**

states, predominately in the Northeast. All the New England campsites are Signature Sites.

Every Tentrr CampKeeper, including those with Backcountry sites, is covered by up to \$2 million in a general liability policy. Tentrr promises a \$1 million marketing and advertising campaign to attract campers along with 24/7 customer support for campers and CampKeepers.

CampKeepers are responsible for site maintenance and upkeep and replacing expendables. At the end of the season Signature Site CampKeepers also are responsible for preparing the campsite for winter.

CampKeeper's rental earnings are automatically deposited in their bank account. They also retain 100 percent flexibility and control over bookings of their site.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Tentrr, Inc., 35 E. Broadway, Floor 4, New York, N.Y. 10002 (ph 888 798-9093; www.tentrr.com).

## Group Connects With "Offsite"

Bypass boring and sometimes expensive RV campsites. Members of Boondockers Welcome can choose from more than 1,500 free parking spots offered by hosts around the U.S., Canada and a few international sites.

"My husband and I had been RVing for almost 20 years and loved boondocking, an RV term for parking away from established campgrounds," says Marianne Edwards, co-founder, Boondockers Welcome. "Our best memories were the people we met. Often they would invite us to visit if we came through their area, telling us we wouldn't need a campground. I thought it would be great to have a network to connect RVers."

When a niece told her about traveling around Europe and using the website couchsurfing.com, the concept came together for Boondockers Welcome.

With the help of a daughter, Edwards set up the RV co-op. Visitors to the website pay an annual \$30 subscription. This allows them to create a profile for hosts to review before responding to a request for a visit. Even before subscribing, website viewers can review potential host profiles about the site and available amenities.

Non-members as well as members can agree to host. If they want to use the site when traveling, hosts pay a reduced membership of \$15. However, each time they host another member, even the smallest RV, they earn 3 months free membership. Hosts can decide who they accept based on profiles, as well as when and for what length of stay.

"The idea is to have places to stop for a day or two when travelling," says Edwards. "Host sites are not intended as a place to set up camp for 3 weeks and call it your family vacation."

Edwards was well-suited to start the



**Marianne Edwards and her husband co-founded Boondockers Welcome as a network to connect RVers.**

website. Over the years of travel she had established a blog about RVing. As a result, when she announced the site, she quickly had 300 members.

"We host members ourselves and really enjoy the interaction," says Edwards. "Some don't know until they arrive that I am the person behind the website. We've had guests from England and British Columbia and have become very good friends with guests from Texas."

"The only requirement of members is that they be totally self-contained," says Edwards. "Some hosts may have water or an electrical hookup, while others simply offer a place to park. The great thing is that hosts can interact with visiting members as much or as little as they wish or as they have time to do."

Edwards asks interested FARM SHOW readers to contact her through her website.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Boondockers Welcome (www.boondockerswelcome.com).