

“Folks like the timeless look of wood-fired pottery. They’re earth-tone and natural. We want to make pots and dishes that people want to handle every day, like a favorite coffee mug or bowl for their cereal,” Hulin says.



Artists Create Beautiful Wood-Fired Pottery

Creating wood-fired pottery is a lot of work, but it’s also very satisfying, says potter Cary Hulin, who owns Holmes County Pottery with his wife, Stephanie. Their “harvests” come three times a year when they go into their massive kiln to see the results of four months of shaping (Cary), painting (Stephanie), glazing, and firing pottery.

They never know exactly what they’ll find because the flames carry ash that lands on the pottery and melts into each piece, adding serendipitous artistic effects.

“The kiln holds about 2 tons of pottery,” Hulin says and is shaped like an upside-down boat hull, 21 ft. long, 6 ft. tall, and 7 ft. wide. “Filling it is like assembling a giant puzzle over 10 days to make sure there are enough gaps between the pots so the flame can find its way through.”

The flame is impressive, moving like a river through the kiln from the firebox and shooting up to a 15-ft. flame out the chimney. Each wood firing takes 3 days, up to four cords of hardwood slab bundles, and as many as eight helpers fueling the fire during the last 24 hrs. In addition to feeding the firebox, there are five side ports on each side to bring the heat up to 2,400 F after a low fire for the first 48 hrs. The Hulins let the kiln cool down for a week before entering and removing their pottery.

“We do it at a slow pace to see how the fire has treated them. It’s the most satisfying time

when we see the results, even emotional,” Hulin says.

That helps balance all the work required, including building the kiln.

“When you’re a potter, you’re a part-time mechanic, carpenter, and brick mason, and you know about thermal expansion. You need to be proficient, and self-reliance is part of being a professional,” Hulin says.

Holmes County in Ohio is ideal for the rural business, he adds. About half the clay for the business comes from southern Ohio. The area also has many sawmills with hardwood scraps and Amish communities with workers interested in helping fuel the kiln. Located about halfway between Cleveland and Columbus, it has a booming tourist industry of visitors, especially those looking for the area’s biggest product, Amish furniture.

In addition to local sales, the Hulins plan to create a website for online sales. They currently post photos and sell through social media sites.

“The reward is the work itself. Most of my potter friends never retire because we love making pots,” Hulin says.

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Herdwicks are a dual-purpose wool and meat breed. The fleece is unique, with four separate fibers.

‘Smiling’ Sheep Gaining Popularity In U.S.

Herdwick sheep, known as the smiling sheep, are born with black bodies and white faces. The first semen was imported to North America in 2008. Increased availability of frozen semen is expanding the genetic base, and several breeders are establishing a national breed registry.

Erin and Ray Bradt have been breeding Herdwicks since 2012. They’ve sold varying percentage Herdwicks from Vermont to Texas. With more than 70 head, Erin is believed to have the largest Herdwick flock in the U.S.

“We first saw them on a PBS special and began to research them,” says Erin Bradt. “I learned about Linda Stimson, who imported the first semen and began a breeding program. We purchased two 75 percent rams and four 62.5 percent ewes from her.”

Bradt added to her genetics in 2018 with semen initially imported by Stimson and again in 2022 with additional semen imports. Since then, she has imported another 400 straws of Herdwick semen. She retained 100 straws, some of which are again for sale.

Introducing a breed through semen imports is a years-long process, especially when import restrictions are put in place or changed. Bradt is excited about the impact of the new genetics and developing the breed. Herdwicks are native to the Lake District in England and survive winter at 3,000 ft. elevation.

“We were looking for an old-fashioned sheep breed that’s low input, and the Herdwicks are awesome,” says Bradt. “They get fat on shrubs and weeds. We practice rotational grazing and have had them on pasture from April through January. We rarely feed grain, except for flushing ewes to breed and for older animals.”

Herdwicks are a dual-purpose wool and meat breed. The fleece is unique, with four separate fibers.

“Farmers who raise them in England attest that they’re the first to dry off after a heavy rain,” says Bradt. “Water sheds right off the fleece. It’s coarse but very warm.”

The breed is slow to mature. Bradt waits up to 18 mos. to breed ewe lambs but has bred ewes as old as 11 years. They tend to produce singles, although she gets some twins. The ewes are excellent mothers, requiring little to no help at lambing.

“I retain only those lambs for breeding with the best Herdwick traits,” says Bradt. “They need to have a good dense fleece and a short stocky body. They must have a clean white face and legs and good hooves.”

While born black-bodied, the fleece on purebred animals lightens with shearing to brown and finally a blue-gray. Bradt suggests that even a 50 percent Herdwick can be born with that breed’s coloring, no matter the foundation ewe.

Her Herdwicks are still larger than



Herdwicks are ideal for small landholders looking for quality, not quantity, suggests Bradt.

purebreds, but she’s getting closer to the 100-lb. average for ewes and 175-lb. average for rams.

Those not retained for breeding are processed at 18 months or older. They have a high meat-to-bone ratio. Although smaller than conventional sheep breeds, Bradt has found roasts to be comparable in size.

“I’ve tasted lamb from many breeds, and the Herdwicks are the best I’ve ever tasted,” says Bradt.

Bradt’s ewes vary in price depending on bloodlines. Ewes bred with AI require laparoscopic surgery from a veterinarian to qualify for the breed registry. Registry in the Herdwick Sheep Breeders Association of North America will also require documented pedigrees.

“Recordkeeping is very important to me,” she says. “As far as I know, my flock is the only fully documented Herdwicks in the country. We’re finalizing bylaws and hope the registry will be up and running by April.”

Bradt hopes to begin importing 100 percent Herdwick embryos in 2025. “The British breed association has accredited the rams,” she says. “I hope to go to England next year to locate the ewes and have embryos collected.”

Herdwicks are ideal for small landholders looking for quality, not quantity, suggests Bradt. “We’re trying to keep the breed affordable,” she says. “It’s such a great breed. We don’t want it to be a fad but a standard for small landholders.”

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Rabbit Tobacco Has Many Uses

If you’ve heard of cudweed or sweet everlasting, then you’re already familiar with rabbit tobacco (*pseudognaphalium obtusifolium*). This North American native maxes out at around 2 ft. tall and is recognized by dull white flowers and leaves and stems that appear covered in a soft white fuzz. Step close, and you might notice its distinctive maple syrup scent.

Rabbit tobacco is a bi-annual herbaceous plant that’s part of the aster family, making it a close relative of the dandelion. It blooms in the fall, though the plant doesn’t change much when it does so. Even when dead and dried out, it’ll still have its dry, fuzzy look that makes it stand out in fields. You’re most likely to find the plant in dry, sandy habitats across eastern North America. Woodlands, coastal dunes, roadsides, and lightly disturbed areas are all prime growing spaces.

Despite its name, rabbit tobacco is usually not smoked. However, there’s some historical precedence for using its smoke to “cure” people haunted by ghosts and send spirits to the afterlife. Still, it offers some health benefits and has been a staple of medicinal practices for Native American tribes for centuries.

For example, the Cherokee turned it into an infusion for relieving muscle cramps and ingested it with Carolina Vetch to treat



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rheumatism. For the Choctaw, the leaves and blossoms were used to ease lung pain. Likewise, the Alabama Tribe found it valuable for addressing insomnia. Other tribes have found value in the scrappy weed as a natural perfume, treatment for vomiting, and fever reliever, among other uses. Rabbit tobacco also found a place in Southern folk medicine.

Some believe the plant works best once the leaves turn brown after being touched by the first frost. That’s because the phytochemicals, including terpenes, don’t develop until then. These compounds have a wide variety of effects and are known for their anticancer, antispasmodic, and antiviral properties.