

Hazelnut grower finds satisfaction in service

By DENISE RUTTAN
For the Capital Press

Giving back is important to longtime hazelnut grower Wayne Chambers, who has presided over his 145-acre orchard for the last 50 years with his wife, Joann.

From testing new hazelnut varieties for Oregon State University, his alma mater, to donating nuts to the culinary program at Linn-Benton Community College, to mentoring rookie growers, Chambers is always willing to lend a hand.

New varieties

Chambers has grown all of the new varieties released by OSU in the last 30 years in his orchard near Albany, Ore. Over the years he has probably tested about 150 different varieties in on-farm trials, Chambers said.

His assistance to OSU's hazelnut breeding program arose out of loyalty to his alma mater.

"I graduated from OSU in horticulture in 1963 and I remained friends with the professors," Chambers said.

His interest in the research also came from curiosity. "It's interesting to see the variations between the varieties," Chambers said. "I can take grafted trees on different rootstocks so I can see what effect the rootstock had on the scion of the tree, and how some of the weaker varieties can be improved with stronger rootstock."

For the last 20 years Chambers has worked with OSU hazelnut breeder Shawn Mehlenbacher. Chambers' orchard has provided one of the final testing grounds of a long, arduous journey in the life of a new hazelnut variety. Before reaching his soil, that tree once began as a seed, selected from a pool of 4,500 seeds,



Courtesy of OSU

Wayne Chambers, Willamette Valley hazelnut grower, has worked closely with Oregon State University researchers over the decades.

and has been pared down until Chambers could plant 10 seeds.

"It takes about 17 years from the time you make the original cross with the known parents until you release it as a variety," Chambers said.

New opportunities

Part of the driving force behind that research into new varieties involves a growing desperation among those orchardists who had planted older varieties such as Bar-

celona. All legacy growers know the devastation that Eastern Filbert Blight has brought to Willamette Valley hazelnuts and Chambers is no exception.

In fact many older orchards have closed shop because of it. The older trees like Barcelona are more susceptible to this disease, which can spread through an orchard like wildfire. He will be planting new varieties soon and removing more susceptible varieties.



Hazelnut Trees

JEFFERSON

- Large in-shell variety with a very high resistance to eastern filbert blight.

SACAJAWEA

- Early kernel or in-shell variety with a high level of quantitative resistance to eastern filbert blight.

YAMHILL

- Early kernel variety resistant to eastern filbert blight. Very productive small stature tree.

DORRIS

- Nut yield & maturity similar to Barcelona. Excellent texture and flavor, resistant to eastern filbert blight.

WEPSTER

- Early kernel variety dropping a week before Barcelona. Resistant to eastern filbert blight. A more vigorous and upright growth habit than Yamhill.

MCDONALD

- Early kernel variety with a high 52% shell out percentage. A grower friendly tree with an open growth habit. McDonald carries the Gasaway gene.

York, Eta, Theta, and Felix are available for pollinizers

All varieties were developed by the Oregon State University breeding program.

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