# **People & Places**

# A passion for exotic plants

# Jim Gilbert grows rare cultivars that produce fruit at his **Oregon nursery**

# By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI Capital Press

The combination of two obscure passions — for the Russian language and exotic fruit — led Jim Gilbert to success in his career as a nurseryman.

Gilbert launched his nursery roughly a decade before his first visit to Russia in 1990, when the communist Soviet Union was on the verge of collapse.

There, he discovered uncommon varieties of seaberry, honeyberry and Cornelian cherry, among others, to bring back to his Northwoods Nursery near Molalla, Ore.

"I had a feeling of opening up a treasure chest," said Gilbert.

In the Soviet era, a lot of Russia's agricultural research was devoted to home gardeners, he said. While commercial production was carried out on collective farms, many fruits and vegetables were grown by city dwellers on small intensively managed plots.

"That's how people survived, by growing their own food," Gilbert said.

Plants that can endure Russia's brutal winters are often suited to growing in the Pacific Northwest, where they still experience the necessary winter chill but not extremely low temperatures.

Over time, Gilbert expanded his network of plant contacts in former Soviet states, such as Uzbekistan, Kyrgyz-



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Jim Gilbert has combined an interest in Russian with an interest in unusual fruit-bearing plants at Northwoods Nursery near Molalla, Ore.

stan, Ukraine and Belarus. He also traveled farther east, collecting rare persimmon varieties in South Korea and pineapple guava in New Zealand.

# Unusual varieties

Among the nursery's signature products are unusual varieties of common fruits. such as columnar apples, which gardeners with small yards favor for their vertical tree structure. Gilbert has also found success with previously little-known American fruits, such as pawpaws.

Nursery stock that produces fruit has generally been more resilient during economic downturns, he said.

"I've always liked growing edible things," Gilbert said. "It's not just ornamental, it actually gives you something." Originally, Gilbert spe-

cialized in chestnuts, black walnuts, black locusts and Norway maples, but he had his fruit "breakthrough" in the mid-1980s because of the popularity of hardy kiwis.

As he delved deeper into rare cultivars, Gilbert found that some information wasn't readily available in English - prompting a reacquaintance with the Russian language, which he studied in high school and college.

Aside from easing plant research, his increased proficiency in Russian helped Gilbert complete his bachelor's degree in the language in 1997, which he'd begun roughly three decades earlier.

These days, Northwoods Nursery grows hundreds of varieties of roughly 60 types of fruit on 66 acres, with about 60 percent of the production dedicated to containers and the rest to bareroot stock.

Managing this broad assortment of species isn't easy, he said. "For a lot of plants, there is no guidebook. You have to figure it out on your own.'

# Labor challenge

He is now facing a problem common in agriculture: insufficient labor. Despite strong demand for his products, Gilbert's growth is constrained by a dearth of employees.

"It's a really frustrating situation," he said. "We're going to cut back on what we grow.<sup>3</sup>

Labor shortages forced Gilbert to sell off his retail operation, One Green World, in 2015, allowing him to focus on wholesale marketing to independent garden centers and mail order nurseries that sell



# Western Innovator

Jim Gilbert Occupation: Owner of Northwoods Nursery

Hometown: Molalla, Ore. Family: Partner, Lorraine Gardner, and four grown children

Age: 73

Education: Bachelor's degree in Russian Language from Portland State University in 1997

**Quote:** "I've always liked growing edible things. It's not just ornamental, it actually gives you something."

through catalogs.

However, his nursery operation is finding ways to improve efficiency and make the best use of available workers.

For example, employees now graft buds onto trees with Parafilm — a wax-based adhesive — rather than plastic tape, avoiding labor later in the process.

'It breaks down on its own. You don't have to go back and cut the tape," Gilbert said.

He's also covering rows of plants with sheets of plastic - thereby suppressing weeds while reducing water usage and boosting growth. He also recently invested in a more efficient potting machine.

"There have been some major changes in the way we do business," he said.

4 p.m. and include student

presentations about various

projects. The dinner will be

held under a big tent and

will include chicken and

pork produced at the college

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# **College selling tickets, soliciting sponsorships for fall Harvest Fest**

# **Bv TIM HEARDEN** Capital Press

REDDING, Calif. — A community college agriculture program is selling tickets and signing up sponsors for its annual fall fundraiser on Oct. 7.



right through the gate and take the farm tour over here." she said.

The festival was started several years ago after the ag program survived a budget crunch in 2009 and needed to find ways to

Shasta College's annual Harvest Fest will feature tours of the college's 90-acre farm and a dinner with locally produced food and beverages at the adjacent Ross Ranch. The ranch is owned by the McConnell Foundation, a local philanthropic organization.

"This year is going to be better because we're back in a ranch and farming setting," said Trena Kimler-Richards, an agricultural instructor and Tim Hearden/Capital Press File

John Livingston, a heavy equipment instructor at Shasta College in Redding, Calif., shows off a 1956 McCormick Cub tractor at the agriculture program's annual Harvest Fest last year. This year's festival, a major fundraiser for the program, will be Oct. 7.

program coordinator. Last nearby community center. year's dinner was held at a

generate revenue. Proceeds from the event fund lab projects, farm dormitories, logging sports and equipment and work with livestock, organizers said.

The farm raises livestock, hay and other commodities, and its dormitory program immerses students in the operation. It's now a money-maker for the community college district, selling premium goats, pigs and cattle.

The tours will begin at ards at (530) 242-2209.

as well as locally produced beer and wine. The event will also feature live music and silent

and live auctions of donated

vance or \$40 at the door and

can be purchased online at

http://bit.ly/2wKGboj. Ta-

ble sponsorships are available by filling out the form

at https://www.facebook.

Leimone Waite at (530)

242-2210 or Kimler-Rich-

For information, contact

1-800-765-9055

com/shastaagriculture/

edu/sorec/SF-classes

Friday, Sept. 29

Fall Forestry Educational Sem-

inar. 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Cowlitz Region-

al Conference Center, 1900 Sev-

enth Ave. SW, Longview, Wash.

Sponsored by the Washington

Tree Farm Program, this seminar

includes information on managing

and maintaining tree farms. ATFS

certified tree Farmers are \$70

(\$105 with spouse), others are \$80

(\$120 with spouse). Register by

Drone World Expo 2017. San

Jose Convention Center, 150 W.

San Carlos St., San Jose, Calif.

The Expo will feature a robust

exhibit floor, visionary keynote

speakers, timely and indus-

try-leading educational programs

and networking events. The busi-

ness-to-business event attracts

over 3,000 professional attendees

from a variety of industries from

agriculture to law enforcement.

Website: www.droneworldexpo.

Sept. 8. Website: watreefarm.org

**Tuesday-Wednesday** 

Oct. 3-4

Tickets are \$35 in ad-

goods.

1 year U.S. ..... \$49.99 2 years U.S. ..\$89.99 1 year Canada.....\$275 1 year other countries ...... call for quote 1 year Internet only.....\$49.99 1 year 4-H, FFA students and teachers ....\$30 9 months 4-H, FFA students & teachers .....\$25 Visa and Mastercard accepted

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# Calendar Sponsored by:

To submit an event go to the Community Events calendar on the home page of our website at www. capitalpress.com and click on "Submit an Event." Calendar items can also be mailed to Capital Press, 1400 Broadway St. NE, Salem, OR 97301 or emailed to newsroom@capitalpress.com.

# Through Monday, Sept. 4

Oregon State Fair. 10 a.m.-10 p.m. Oregon State Fair & Exposition Center, 2330 17th St. NE, Salem, Ore. Website: https://oregonstatefair. org/

Twin Falls County Fair. Twin Falls County Fairgrounds, 215 Fair Ave., Filer, Idaho. Events include the Magic Valley Stampede PRCA Rodeo, concerts, monster trucks, carnival and many other features and activities. Website: http://tfcfair.com/

# Through Friday, Sept. 1

Idaho Grower Shippers Association 89th Annual Meeting. Sun Valley Resort, 1 Sun Valley Road, Sun Valley. On behalf of the board of directors and convention committee chairman Weston Crapo, members are invited to join the IGSA for education, fun and business at its 89th Annual Convention in Sun Valley, Idaho. Website: http://bit.ly/2wkjkQU

# Friday, Sept. 1-Saturday, Sept. 9

Eastern Idaho State Fair. 8 a.m.-10 p.m. Eastern Idaho State Fairgrounds, 97 Park St., Blackfoot, Idaho. Website: https://funatthefair. com/

# Friday, Sept. 1-Sunday, Sept. 24

Washington State Fair. 10 a.m.-10 p.m. Fairground in Puyallup, 110 9th Ave. SW, Puyallup, Wash. The Washington State Fair, commonly referred to as the Puyallup Fair, is the largest single attraction held annually in the state of Washington. Closed Tuesdays and Sept. 6. Website: www.thefair.com/

# **Tuesday-Friday** Sept. 5-8

Western Apicultural Society's 40th annual conference. University of California-Davis Harry H. Laidlaw Jr. Honey Bee Research Facility, Davis, Calif. Bee Culture magazine editor Kim Flotton will address "The Rapidly Changing Bee Scene;" beekeeper and author Les Crowder will discuss managing honeybees in top bar hives; and bee expert Larry Connor will cover "Keeping Your Bees Alive and Growing." Cost: \$225. Website: www.westernapiculturalsociety.org/

# **Tuesday-Thursday** Sept. 5-7

The National Heirloom Expo. Sonoma County Fairgrounds, 1350 Bennett Valley Road, Santa Rosa, Calif. The 6th Annual National Heirloom Exposition will feature a wide array of natural vendors and speakers from across the country

and beyond. Website: www.theheirloom.com

"We'll be able to come

www.oxarc.com

# Wednesday, Sept. 13

•

FSPCA Preventive Controls for Human Food - One-Day Blended Course. 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Hilton Garden Inn, 1741 Harrison St., Twin Falls, Idaho. The new Food Safety Modernization Act regulation requires every processing facility to have a trained resource person or "Preventive Controls Qualified Individual" who has completed a specialized training course (such as this one) that was developed by the Food Safety Preventive Controls Alliance and is recognized by the FDA. This person will oversee the implementation of the facility's food safety plan and other key tasks. Jeff Kronenberg, an assistant professor at the University of Idaho and Food Safety Specialist at TechHelp, will offer this One-Day FSPCA Blended Course as an alternative to the traditional 2.5day course. Cost: \$330. Website: www.techhelp.org

# Thursday, Sept. 14

Food Safety Internal Auditor Workshop. 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Hilton Garden Inn, 1741 Harrison St., Twin Falls, Idaho. A comprehensive audit system is essential to a company's food safety and product quality. It provides confirmation that systems and procedures are operating effectively and identifies areas that require improvement. The Internal Internal Auditor Workshop will teach

dits in your facility against one of the GFSI Audit Schemes, which are becoming a standard for the food industry as a tool for assur-

ing food safety and regulatory compliance and have become a customer requirement for many processors. Many of the schemes require formal, documented training for personnel who conduct internal auditing. This one-day course will provide attendees with a full understanding of audit requirements as well as promote personal professional development. Cost: \$330. Website: www.

2nd Annual Rice Weed Course. 8 a.m.-4:25 p.m. Rice Experiment Station, 955 Butte City Highway, Biggs, Calif. Website: http://cesutter.ucanr.edu/

# Saturday, Sept. 23

Goat Education Day. 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. OSU Southern Oregon Research and Extension Center Auditorium. 569 Hanley Road, Central Point, Ore. Choose four classes from a selection of 11, two in the morning and two in the afternoon, for \$35. Or choose two morning classes and cheesemaking in the afternoon for \$50. Class topics are geared to both beginner and advanced goat owners from Getting Ready for Kidding Season and Holistic Goat Care to the foundations of Nutrition and Feed and the Making of Goat Milk Soaps and Lotions.

GASES / WELDING / SAFETY / FIRE 20 Northwest Locations

## you how to conduct internal au-Presenters include Dr. Charles Estill, OSU veterinarian; Gianaclis Caldwell, author; and Christina Strickland and others from the Rogue Valley Dairy Goat Association. Register online at http://bit. ly/JacksonGoatEdDay2017 or call 541-776-7371. Ask about a youth discount. Cost: \$35 to \$50. Website: http://extension.oregonstate.

techhelp.org

Friday, Sept. 15