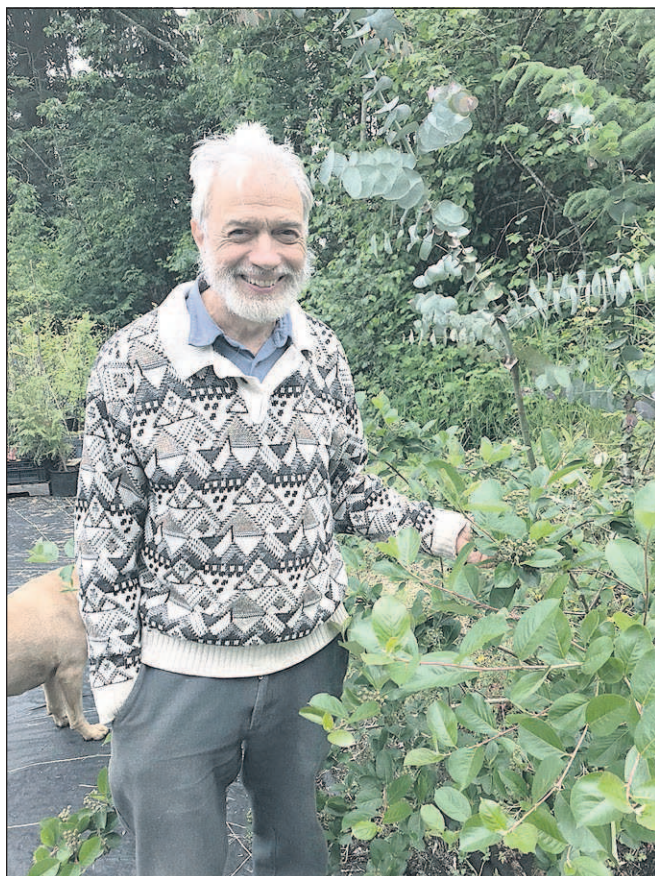


Burnt Ridge Nursery finds the unusual



Photos by Sheryl Harris/For the Capital Press

Michael Dolan shows the Aronia whose berries are black, about the size of blueberries, and very astringent.

By SHERYL HARRIS
For the Capital Press

In 1980, Michael Dolan was a young man fresh out of military service. Then he read "Eating on the Wild Side," by Jo Robinson.

"It changed my life," he says.

He biked around hill and dale looking for a suitable place to grow things.

He found 21 acres on the side of Burnt Ridge outside Onalaska, Wash., south of Olympia. At first, he grew things for himself, plants not commonly found in the nursery trade. Ten years later, he expanded to add retail sales.

Today, Michael and his wife, Carolyn, have a thriving organic nursery specializing in plants that are edible, medicinal or both. Their mail order nursery "specializes in unusual and disease-resistant trees, vines and shrubs that produce edible nuts or fruits" — and many Northwest-native shrubs and trees suitable for landscaping.

Recently they added a com-



Young chestnut, butternut, hazelnut, black walnut and hickory trees at Burnt Ridge Nursery.

mercial kitchen to make apple sauce, jams and fruit butters.

The Dolans' fresh produce, jams and sauces can be found at the Olympia Farmers' Market, where they have been marketing for the past 34 years. They also sell to Olympia's two co-ops, Charlie's Produce in Seattle and they wholesale to Discovery Organics in British Columbia.

"We have diversified over time," says Michael Dolan. "That's the key to our success."

Curiosity may also be a key

to their success.

"I wanted to push boundaries of what could be grown here. Underutilized crops seemed a good place to start," he says.

Curiosity may also explain why he searched the world to find a cool-weather fig. "Most figs don't ripen here, but I found some that do."

Some of their experiments failed miserably — "Like the pecans," he says, gesturing toward an area that was a pecan orchard until recently. "We replaced it with a mulberry orchard. That's a very dependable crop for us."

Other experiments have worked well. For instance, Dolan grows 30-40 varieties of grapes, but he also propagates young trees between the vines.

"We also plant things that are shade tolerant under trees or trellises. It's a good use of land," Dolan explains.

Dolan pulls the branch of a bush to get a good look at it.

"This is Aronia," he says. "The berries are used as an anti-inflammatory, and they have properties similar to cranberries for urinary infections, but much more potent. They are very astringent. In fact, they're called Chokeberry in some parts of the country."

Dolan says that Aronia is used in Eastern Europe and Russia on a "massive scale," and that it is easy to grow. "They have awesome fall colors — scarlets that are great for landscaping."

Ginkgo biloba is a weeping columnar shrub native to Washington, but it is no longer wild anywhere in the world and is only found under cultivation. It would seem prudent to reintroduce it in the Northwest since it is resistant to fire, he says.

"The edible nut is highly esteemed in Asia, although the husks will stink if allowed to rot," Dolan says. "The female produces nuts only if there is a male available to pollinate it. The leaves are widely used in herbal medicine for circulation, tinnitus and memory, and their fall foliage is brilliant."

Burnt Ridge Nursery also has three kinds of kiwi, including one that grows in clusters like grapes and two that are smooth-skinned.

"They are not affected by late frosts," Dolan explains, "and the three different species allow us to have fruit year-round. They are super nutritious and are said to slow macular degeneration and cataracts."

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