

Notes from a Rogue entomologist**Introducing the Paragon, a pear born and bred in southern Oregon**

BY RICHARD J. HILTON

I have now been working with pears for more than a quarter of a century, and I will be the first to say that pears can be a tough sell. There's an old French saying, "You eat an apple when *you* are ready. You eat a pear when *it* is ready." Or, as Ralph Waldo Emerson put it, "There are only ten minutes in the life of a pear when it is perfect to eat." Needless to say, in a world where the demand for instant gratification becomes ever more resounding, the elusive secrets of the pear seem further and further remote.

In order to ripen a European pear correctly, you must store freshly picked fruit in a cool place for an extended period of time. The exact amount of time varies with the cultivar and the storage temperature. For instance, a Bartlett can be held for as little as a week while an Anjou must be stored for over a month. After this period of cooling the pear is placed at room temperature for up to a week. You know that a pear is ripe when the flesh near the stem yields to gentle pressure. Some cultivars, like Bartlett, will turn yellow as the fruit ripens. If the fruit has not been cooled for long enough then it may never ripen. But a perfectly ripe pear is a wonder, sweet and juicy, with a melting texture. The pear cultivar that is universally acknowledged as the premier eating pear is the Doyenné du Comice, better known locally as Harry and David's Royal Riviera.

But the difficulty in ripening pears has led to the development of some newer varieties that can be eaten



The Paragon, a cross between Comice and red Bartlett, is literally a Comice in the skin of a Bartlett.

unripened or crisp and crunchy. One such pear, called Gem, which I have sampled, is being developed by the US Department of Agriculture and is being tested in Hood River. Being partial to fully ripened European pears, I was quite prepared to dislike Gem, but it was very nice with a good pear taste.

There are those (one of my sons among them) who prefer their pears crunchy; however, I do not think the pear can beat the apple at its own game. So in order to promote pears, we need to educate folks on how to ripen pears properly. I have found that kids love sweet ripened pears when they are provided. We also need to develop good quality pear cultivars. The Southern Oregon Experiment Station (now part of the Southern Oregon Research and Extension Center or SOREC) conducted an extensive pear-breeding program until the 1960s that focused on two key factors:

good taste and red skin color. Many crosses were made, almost always with Comice as one parent and often with a red Bartlett pear as the other. Three red pear cultivars were released from this program: the Reimer Red in 1961, Rogue Red in 1969, and Cascade in 1985. While these pears were planted locally to some extent and the Cascade was patented and planted more widely, they never really caught on.

But from the breeding program in southern Oregon, two cultivars were selected not for their appearance, as they had no red color, but for their eating quality. One was planted by Mike Thorniley, a local orchardist, and he dubbed it BestEver. It is now grown and marketed by Meyer Orchards in Talent and has been such a good seller that more acreage has been planted.

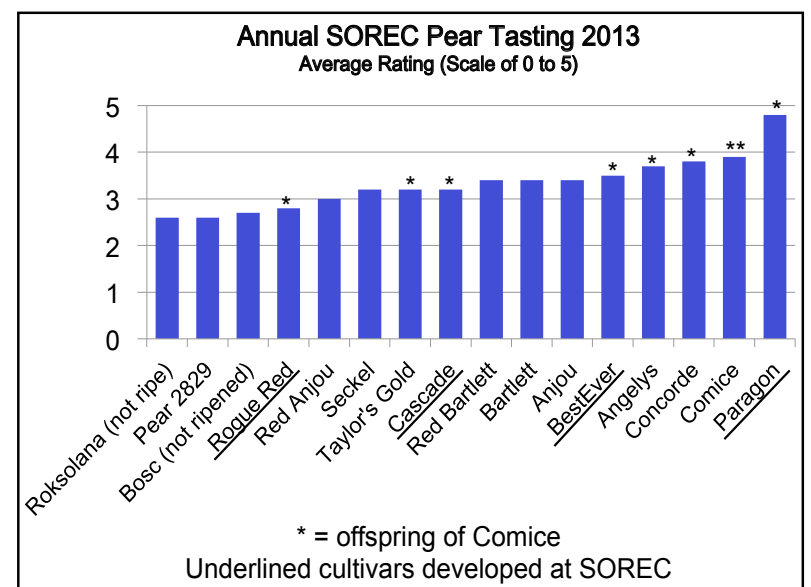
And this brings me to the final selection from the breeding program to be

released. We call it the Paragon, and it lives up to its name. It is a rather unassuming pear—its looks much like its Bartlett parent, but like its Comice parent, it is a glorious eating experience. Unlike Comice, the skin is thin and very palatable. When ripened it will melt in your mouth and the flavor washes over you like a wave at the Oregon coast.

At SOREC, a pear tasting has been held annually since 2008.

In recent years participants have rated the cultivars they taste, with Paragon consistently receiving the highest overall rating (see chart). This cultivar was overlooked for so many years because its appearance is so ordinary, but it is no ordinary pear. With the release of this cultivar our hope is that some grower will champion it. But if that does not happen, at least it will be available to the public to plant and enjoy. To quote Thomas Jefferson, "The greatest service which can be rendered any country is to add a useful plant to its culture."

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**AGRICULTURE**

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variety of lavender products, from lotions and soap to culinary delights.

Applegate producers sell their goods to local restaurants, at farmers' markets, in on-site stores, and to friends. Lark's restaurant in Ashland buys lambs irrelevant to the genetic pool from the Weavers and beef from Peter Salant. Morning Glory in Ashland, the C Street Bistro in Jacksonville, and New Sammy's in Talent also buy Salant beef. Mike sells hay by word of mouth, the Owens' store is on their farm, and Whistling Duck sells produce at the Medford and Ashland growers' markets, in the Ashland Co-op and Food 4 Less, and at the on-site store, now fully staffed in a new building.

Cougars, bears, and coyotes can be a problem for livestock in the Applegate. But, Peter says, "The predators were here first," so the farmer pursues prevention. Dogs are valuable guardians of livestock. Hay farmers are plagued by unexpected summer rain, and labor (not bugs, which, Mary says, just come and go) is the main problem for the vegetable

farmer, since the Applegate does not have a large Hispanic community or access to other labor pools. Water is only a problem for Applegate agriculturists depending on location and crop. Sue and Derek Owen use drip irrigation from a well, but they are lucky (or wise in their choice), for lavender is not a thirsty plant. Whistling Duck Farm is on the Applegate River, so water is no problem.

Farm work repeats itself. Soay sheep need new pasture every four days. Whistling Duck crops are rotated yearly. In a good summer, Mike cuts alfalfa four times. Peter needs six days every two weeks to flood the pastures for the good grass that makes the good milk that makes the big calves.

All in all, whether the farmer is raising livestock or growing crops, the Applegate is a pretty good place to be. Sheep, cattle, hogs, lavender, vegetables, hay—everything thrives under good care just like the rest of us in the Applegate.

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Sue and Derek Owen grow fields of lavender on their English Lavender Farm.



Peter Salant raises cattle on the old Kleinhammer Ranch.

4-H: Youth development for 100 years

The earliest record of 4-H activity in Jackson County comes in 1913 under the name of the Industrial Club. Members took part in local projects, the state fair, and the Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco. Two of Oregon's ten delegates to the Exposition came from Jackson County.

In 1914, Congress passed the Smith-Lever Act, expanding vocational, agricultural, and home demonstration programs in rural America through land-grant universities. By 1916 the program was being called 4-H and had extended into Josephine County. In 1921, 4-H exhibited for the first time at the Josephine County Fair. (The 4-H emblem, patented in 1924, is still a green four-leaf clover with a white "H" on each leaflet, symbolizing Head, Heart, Hands, and Health.)

The organization languished during the lean years of the early 1930s, but in 1935 club work picked up. In 1939 a new organizational plan led to increased activities including, in Jackson County, a skits festival, a countywide picnic, and the first annual leaders' banquet. Energy slowed during World War II, when the shortage of tires and gasoline meant fewer meetings. After the war, activities picked up again.

Today the 4-H mission is the same as it was when 4-H started: youth development. The most significant thing 4-H does, says Sue Hunt, a leader of 4-H in

Josephine County, is "assist youth in finding their passion and equip them to become healthy, confident, competent, caring and contributing members of their family, community, and society," a goal that is voiced in the 4-H pledge: "...for my club, my community, my country, and my world."

Now as from its inception, 4-H uses agricultural and other projects to "hook" youth. "Then, with the assistance of many volunteers and using research-based materials, we help youth develop life skills that they can use in many areas throughout their lives," Sue says. Anne Manlove, of 4-H in Jackson County, enumerates some of those skills: how to use time wisely, how to keep records and fill out forms, how to make good decisions, how to interact and communicate well. Projects like raising steers—having to get up every morning and take care of that animal—teach kids good work ethics.

The agricultural career choice is only one part of 4-H. Students who raise koi are learning the same kinds of things as those who raise hogs and cows. There is also a foods component, horticulture, and expressive arts. All of it works towards the same goal: positive youth development.

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