

Ten minutes with ...



... Matt Richards - brain tanner extraordinaire

When did you come to Cave Junction?
We've been living here since 1997. I like this area because it has a lot of wild country surrounding it, and it's a small town, but not too small. My wife and

I were used to living in a much more remote area. So coming here for us was like we were moving to the big town. We'd never be happy in a bigger place like Grants Pass. There's also a lot of young parents and families here, which is nice; and the land was cheap so we could afford it.

How long have you been married?

We have been married...that's a trick question. I think we've been married three years; known each other 10 years. We have two girls -- Hazel is 4, and Eliza, she's 1 1/2. We have a place we bought out on Dick George Road. We met because we were both into primitive survival skills. There are a couple of events in the West that people go to, and I was teaching hide tanning at one, and we became friends.

Some of the skills I teach at these events is how to start a fire by rubbing two sticks together. It's fun to teach 12-year-old boys because they like to play with fire. Of course, you have to have discipline when you're doing it, so it kinda' weeds out the wrong people. I also teach basketry, how to get wild edible foods, and how to use the whole critter; you know, how to use all the parts out of it.

You tan hides?

I do brain tanning. We get 'em mostly from pork. We used to use cow before mad cow was a problem, now it's illegal to even get cow brains. I do use the animal's own brain. There's an old saying that every animal has enough brains to tan its own hide. But you can't get a deer brain that easily because most hunters need to hold onto the head to prove that they got a legal animal.

There are three major stages to tan a hide. The first is to scrape off layers of the skin. You just soak the hide in water and scrape the flesh off. Then you soak it in some lye. Then you scrape the hair and the grain off. That's the shiny part on a lot of leathers. Then rinse off the lye, and go back over the flesh side again. Then put the hide in the brain mixture.

You have to blend up the brain in a regular blender; not your wife's. It makes a soup; there's nothing gross about it, it's just an oily substance that helps the hide soften. Anyway, then you wring it out and tie up the hide on a rack. You then work it while it's drying -- it's really important, otherwise it will dry stiff -- and you keep stretching it until it's dry and it will come out soft. Then when it's white, you take it down and smoke the hide. There are aldehydes that are in the smoke that react with the proteins in the skin to make it the leather color.

What kinds of hides do you tan?

Some elk, moose, bison or buffalo; we even do caribou and antelope, but mostly deer. I've tanned a skunk hide. It's not bad if it hasn't sprayed yet. When you're tanning them, the last step is to smoke the hide, like you smoke meat, and the smoke kills all of the odor so they don't smell at all like skunk when you are done.

I used to have this cool skunk skin hat that had what looked like racing stripes down the side from the skunk. When I wore it around, the deer would look at me like, "What is wrong with that person, they got a skunk on their head?" One time, I went to New York City because my brother lives there. I had buckskins and my skunk hat on, and I went for a walk around Manhattan. I tell you, people were staring at me like crazy. I think that's the only thing you could wear in New York and get stared at. Even if your hair were purple and spread out with spikes in it, most people wouldn't even notice.

What is your favorite ice cream?

Anything with chocolate. I like chocolate. But right now, I've been liking this Blackberry Avalanche. It didn't sound that good to me at first, but once I ate it -- wow.

~Interview and Photo by Shane Welsh

From the E-mail Bag

Jeff Foxworthy comedy routine: You might be from the Pacific Northwest if:

You know the state flower (Mildew).

You feel guilty throwing aluminum cans or paper in the trash.

You use the statement "sun break" and know what it means.

You know more than 10 ways to order coffee.

You know more people who own boats than air conditioners.

You feel overdressed wearing a suit to a nice restaurant.

You stand on a deserted corner in the rain waiting for the "Walk" signal.

You consider that if it has no snow or has not recently erupted, it is not a real mountain.

You can taste the difference between Starbucks's, Seattle's Best, and Veneto's.

You know the difference between Chinook, Coho, and Sockeye salmon.

You know how to pronounce Sequim, Puyallup, Issaquah, Oregon, and Willamette.

You consider swimming an indoor sport.

You can tell the difference between Japanese, Chinese and Thai food.

In winter, you go to work in the dark and come home in the dark -- while only working eight-hour days.

You never go camping without waterproof matches and a poncho.

You are not fazed by "Today's forecast: Showers followed by rain," and "Tomorrow's forecast: Rain followed by showers."

You cannot wait for a day with "showers and sunbreaks."

You have no concept of humidity without precipitation.

You know that Boring is a town in Oregon and not just a state of mind.

You can point to at least two volcanoes, even if you cannot see through the cloud cover.

You notice "the mountain is out" when it is a pretty day and you can actually see it.

You put on your shorts when the temperature gets above 50, but still wear your hiking boots and parka.

You switch to your sandals when it gets about 60, but keep the socks on.

Nifty Tidbits

By CHUCK RIGBY



A weed, as defined by "Webster's New World Dictionary," is any undesired, uncultivated plant that crowds out a crop or disfigures a lawn. It doesn't indicate that weeds have to be ugly, toxic, or obnoxious.

Some people think dandelions are pretty and even edible; and many ornamental plants, such as violets and columbine, can become weeds if they are allowed to spread. Therefore, the beautiful Queen Anne's Lace, which grows alongside roadways or vacant lots, should be called a weed.

Blooming in the late summer and early fall, Queen Anne's Lace has a large, pretty, white, lace-like flower. It is actually a combination of many small florets that originate from one point on the end of a long stem. This type of flower is called an umbell, like an umbrella, and plants with umbell flowers are placed in the family Umbelliferae. Other common members of the family are: dill, fennel, cow-parsnip, lomatium, and sanicle.

Two local plants in the family that are poisonous are water hemlock and poison hemlock. The last one was responsible for the death of Socrates, and the hemlock tree is not related to either one.

Another edible member of the Umbell family is the garden carrot. The scientific name of the carrot is *Daucus carota*. "Daucus" is the Greek word for carrot and "carota" is the Latin for carrot. Therefore the scientific name means literally "carrot-carrot." This is all relevant because the scientific name of Queen Anne's Lace is also *Daucus carota* and it is sometimes called the wild carrot. This wild plant is thought to be the ancestor of all garden carrots. Carrots were developed in Asia, possibly Afghanistan, by farmers selectively breeding various strains of wild carrots.

Carrots and Queen Anne's Lace are referred to as biennials. This means it takes two years to complete the life cycle. The first year it develops a strong tap root system, and this is when the garden carrot is normally harvested. The second year it will produce flowers and seeds. Garden carrots, left to grow through the second year will produce an umbel-type flower much like Queen Anne's Lace. The deep root produced in the first year allows Queen Anne's Lace to grow on dry roadsides and vacant lots where no watering is taking place. It stands out very clearly from the dry, brown, shallow-rooted grasses around them.

Once Queen Anne's Lace flowers have been pollinated, usually by insects, the seeds begin to form and the flower curls up and form a basket or bird nest shape. The seeds contain little barbs or hooks which attach to an animal's fur for easy dispersal to new locations. Even though Queen Anne's Lace originated in Europe and Asia, the name was not used until the plant was brought to America, probably on purpose as an ornamental and not as a stowaway. In England, the same plant is called cow parsley and is often planted to make flower gardens more attractive. There are several theories about how the name was created and at least four different queens named Anne are thought to be honored.

The central floret in the flower head is often a purple color, which is the royal purple surrounded by her ladies-in-waiting. The lace pattern is also reminiscent of the lace head-dresses worn by some royal women. Another possible source of the name is when a queen, named Anne, challenged her ladies-in-waiting to make a lace pattern as lovely as the cow parsley found in the royal garden.

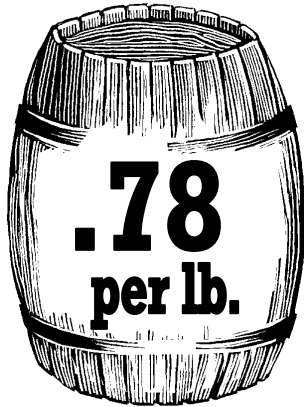
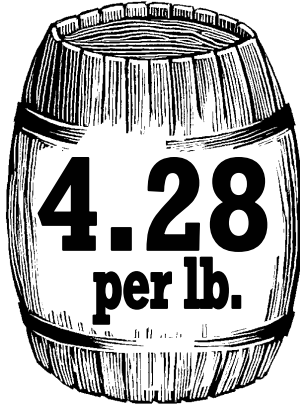
Whatever the real origin of the name, the flower makes a noticeable impression as one walks or drives along our roads and sees the many large, white, lace-like flowers that we have in our area during this dry brown time of year.

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