

Certified Organic Farmers Preserve The Land, Open Health Food Store

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BEDFORD (Bedford Co.)

"God has really blest our land we should take care of it," said Gerald Smith, an organic farmer and health food store owner.

Gerald, his wife, Julie, and son, Joshua, live on a farm just south of Bedford where they have five acres of land in organic fruits and vegetables.

"We plan to clear more land as we have the time and money to do it," Gerald says.

Neat, weedless, rows of blueberries, black berries, red and yellow raspberries, tomatoes, cucumbers, squash, and corn all grown organically are a delicious sight on a cloudless July morning when the air is heavily scented with the smells of summer. Huge, mouth-melting blueberries are ripe and are just one of nearly a dozen varieties grown by the Smiths. Gerald says there are more than 200 varieties of blueberries.

Raspberries, so sweet, one could easily bake an unsugared pie, will soon be ready for picking.

"This year, for the first time, we hope to open picking to the public," he adds.

"We are certified organic farmers and, that is no easy task. We must pass an inspection each year. We use no chemical fertilizers or sprays and we use no chemicals for pest control. We even have to be careful of the type of bindertwine we use," Gerald said.

Gerald and Julie began their farming experience in 1989. As

their interest in organic farming growing increased so their interest in alternative health care. Increasing their knowledge in vitamins, minerals and other natural supplements, the young couple featured a line in a local open market store. As the demand increased, they saw a need for more space and, in several years ago, opened their own store on Pitt Street in Bedford.

"With more space we are able to carry cereals, canned items, and other organically grown or natural products," explains Gerald. "We try to carry organic produce such as kiwi and bananas when possible. The store also provides a market for our own produce."

In a small town, word travels fast and it doesn't take long for any of the outstanding vegetables or berries grown on the Smith farm to disappear.

Some of it never makes it to the shop as Gerald also trucks organic produce to a larger market.

"Our number one problem is predators," the young farmer admits. "We have bugs, birds, raccoons, skunks, opossums, and deer."

"Fighting them naturally isn't easy. We use the praying mantis, ladybugs, green lacy wing, and hairy flies to fight bad bugs. We're grateful for birds like the Eastern bluebird and flycatchers which devour tons of our bug predators."

They use bird callers which sound like hawks or crows to keep the bad birds away and trap a lot of the smaller mammals, transporting them to another location.



The raspberries are almost ripe and ready for picking.

"Then there are droughts or late frosts to add to our aggravations. We have an irrigation system but, thankfully, have not had to use it much this year. It's been a wonderful growing season. Tomato plants were out very early and we only had a few nights that we had to cover them."

"But despite everything, it's all worth it! We like what we are doing and we are preserving the land God gave us."



Gerald at work in the organic store he and Julie operate on Pitt Street in Bedford.

Rodale Institute To Host Workshop For Family Farm Owners

KUTZTOWN (Berks Co.) — The Rodale Institute will host a Field Day and Workshop on Thursday, Aug. 23 titled "Profitable and Environmental Approaches to Regenerating Family Farms."

The workshop will cover farming and marketing techniques designed to help family farmers learn how to "regenerate" their farm for improved yield and profitability.

Topics to be covered will include: soil and livestock/nutrient management for improved water quality; cover-

crops and rotations; transitioning to an organic system; marketing techniques; and a farm equipment tour.

The field day will take place at The Rodale Institute Experimental Farm, 611 Siegfriedale Road, Kutztown. Admission to the workshop is free, and the first 100 registrants get a free lunch and mileage reimbursement. Preregistration is required, and walk-ins must register upon arrival. Interested farmers should contact Maria Pop at (610) 683-1481 or maria.pop@rodaleinst.org.

The day is being co-sponsored by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection and the USDA Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems. The Rodale Institute Experimental Farm is comprised of 333 acres, 290 of which are certified organic. The acreage has been organically farmed since 1972, and functioning as a CSA since 2000. The Experimental Farm conducts a variety of research on soil health and compost, as well as growing grains and forage, vegetables and apples.

Tips To Store Garden Vegetables

Most garden produce needs to be stored either cold, 32-40 F or cool, 50-60 F. Two refrigerators will simplify matters. If cool storage is not available, those vegetables should be stored only briefly. Humidity is also important. Some vegetables need dry storage about 65 percent relative humidity (RH); others need moist 95 percent RH. Home refrigerators are usually dry 50-60 percent RH.

Use perforated plastic bags to create moist conditions because unperforated plastic may cause excessive moisture.

The following crops should be stored cold and moist. (Storage times are estimates).

- Broccoli keeps about 2 weeks.
- Cabbage keeps up to 5 months.
- Green beans keep about one week. Will develop pits below 40F.
- Escarole stores two to three weeks.

Lima beans, shelled, keeps about a week

Muskmelon and ripe melons will store up to 10 days

Sweet corn, husk to conserve space. Keeps 2-5 days depending on variety.

These crops should be stored cool and moist.

Slicing cucumbers keeps about a week; develop pitting below 40F.

Eggplant stores about one week; will discolor below 50F.

Okra stores for one week.

Summer squash about one week; if refrigerated, keep only a few days.

Sweet peppers will keep two weeks; develops pitting below 45F.

Watermelon will keep about one week at room temperature, two weeks in the refrigerator; decays below 50F more than a few days.

Tomatoes are best never refrigerated.

Exposed to temperatures below 50F, unripe ones will not ripen. Ripe tomatoes lose eating quality rapidly in the refrigerator. Garlic and onions need cold and dry storage. Winter squash and pumpkins need cool and dry.

Storage life depends on the condition of the produce as well as storage conditions. Don't expect to store damaged vegetables for these lengths of time.



Gerald and Josh work at weeding the blueberries.



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