



A large sign greets visitors to the Verger du Terroir orchard, located on Bedard Road in New Liskeard. (Staff photo by Sue Nielsen)



Rows upon rows of dwarf cherry trees are now blossoming at Verger du Terroir. The flowering buds carry with them the promise of sweet fruit sometime in August. (Staff photo by Sue Nielsen)



Verger du Terroir owners Yvan Chartrand and Louise Philbin stand beside a dwarf cherry tree, proud to see the trees in their orchard blossoming for the first time. (Staff photo by Sue Nielsen)

A blossoming business

Orchard yielding fruits of growers' labour

Sue Nielsen
Speaker Reporter

TEMISKAMING SHORES — Yvan Chartrand and Louise Philbin's lives have centered on the love of family, agriculture, food, hard work and the north.

The couple's commitment to bring out the best in anything they do continues to grow with their latest business venture, the 25-acre Verger du Terroir orchard located on Bedard Road in New Liskeard.

The couple has planted 20,000 haskap bushes and 5,000 dwarf cherry trees at their property.

The warm spring temperatures have brought out the flowering cherry and haskap blossoms, which have delighted the growers.

"Each day we are seeing changes in the orchard. When we saw the first blossoms on the cherry trees we became very emotional," said Philbin.

The haskap bushes have already bloomed and soon the oblong blue berries, prized for their antioxidants and high Vitamin C content, will be ripe for the picking.

The couple is finally seeing the fruits of their labour paying off and soon they will have a crop of fresh delicious cherries to harvest.

A typical day for the couple in peak growing season runs from dusk to late afternoon, seven days per week and year round work takes place with pruning and other preparations.

"To us it isn't a job, it is something we love to do," said Philbin.

THREE VARIETIES

The orchard produced haskap berries for the first time last year and the growers offered a successful U-pick season for the public.

The haskap berries come in three varieties: beauty, beast and blizzard.

The same system will ring true this season when they eagerly welcome pickers for haskap berries in June and the cherries some time in August.

Pickers will pay \$8 a container for haskap berries and slight-

ly less for cherries, all COVID-19 rules will apply during the picking season.

The dwarf cherry trees may be small in stature, but they offer large yields for fruit tree growers.

"The cherries are a full size fruit with a high sugar content. They will be sweet with a bit of a bite and of course our haskap berries have a bold fruity taste," said Philbin.

Dwarf cherry trees may produce fruit as early as two years after planting. This is the fourth year since the trees were originally planted.

The weather is a factor in successful orchard production. The mild winter didn't hurt the orchard and Philbin says the haskap bushes are super hardy anyway.

"We lost some cherry bushes, but not a lot this year. It was great to welcome Thomas McLean's Timiskaming District Secondary School students to the orchard this spring to complete some pruning work for us," said Philbin.

POLLINATION

Growers of fruit-bearing trees know that buzzing honeybees are an important presence in an orchard as well as being an important factor to provide a sizable crop each year.

The orchard has a number of beehives currently on site with the bees busy doing what they do best, pollinating the haskap and cherry blossoms.

"We were approached by the Loach family, Michelle Loach took the initiative to contact us and they are providing their bees for our orchard pollination," mentioned Philbin.

When the peak bloom begins, the honeybees get to work pollinating the trees.

Without honeybees and cross-pollination there would be no fruit yield, it is that simple.

CHALLENGES

During the winter months temperatures in the Temiskaming region can drop to -40 C, so varieties of fruit must be able to stand up to the extreme weather conditions of North-

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