

Grower Finds Many Uses For Yacon Tubers

Phil Gouy grows great yacons, an Andean cousin to Jerusalem artichokes and sunflowers. This year he grew so many that in addition to making yacon syrup, he even fed them to his pigs. He says the South American tubers are prolific and could fill multiple niches.

"We turned 10 lbs. of crowns into 12,000 lbs. of tubers and who knows how much crown material for replanting in 2022," says Gouy, Girl & Dug Farm.

"I've been working with yacon and other Andean crops for 15 years, but this was my largest crop," says Gouy. "We had three 600-ft. rows. We grew a variety called Crystal, which produces the largest tubers, very clear with hardly any red skin."

Small tubers or rhizomes that make up the crown are covered with about an inch of soil. Initially mulched, as the plant grows it produces a dense canopy up to 6 1/2 ft. tall that shades out most weeds. In 6 to 7 months it can be harvested, but harvested with care to not damage the delicate tubers. While small plots are normally hand dug, Gouy used a backhoe to bring in his 6 tons of tubers.

Tubers weren't all he produced. Each crown harvested with the tubers can be used to start 100 new plants the following spring. Gouy compares yacons to dahlias, which also store energy in tubers, forming crowns near the surface for generating new growth. "For the past 6 years, I sold the crowns, not the tubers," says Gouy. "This year we made syrup to put in our food boxes and for sampling with chefs."

Yacon syrup is a low glycemic sweetener that diabetics can use. He describes it as being similar in color to molasses, but without the flavor. The tubers are peeled



Phil Gouy has found many uses for the Yacon tubers he grows on his California farm.

and boiled down, yielding 25 to 30 percent syrup by weight.

"We are also planning to include some yacons in our food boxes along with recipes," says Gouy.

He notes that some people have reactions to yacons, as they do to Jerusalem artichokes, which is one reason for the limited introduction. The long chain sugars can't be broken down by the digestive system, only by the bacteria in the gut.

With a limited market as yet for the tubers themselves, Gouy has been feeding some to the farm's pigs, chickens and goats. He notes that none of the animals showed any signs of problems eating the tubers.

He also sees a role for yacons as cover crops. "They appear to be very beneficial to the soil, creating a biofilm in the soil," says Gouy. "There are no weeds under the plant, and when they are pulled, the soil has a better texture. I'm planning to use them as cover crops this year."

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New Chicken Breed Has White Feathers, Black Skin

Danielle Noll went from raising her first chickens just 7 years ago to announcing a new breed this year. She started out with common breeds and quickly moved into Polish and Silkies. On a trip to Ohio to buy some birds, she saw a hen that was visually striking.

"She had a black beak and black skin with white feathers," says Noll. "I called her a Moonbeam and decided right then to develop a breed like her."

Noll bought the hen but, unfortunately, it died before she could breed it. So she got busy trying to recreate the bird, which had resulted from a free-range flock of mixed breeds.

Noll started with breeds with more than the normal amount of melanin in every cell of their bodies. The melanin gene is dominant and makes their skin, feathers, beaks and organs black.

She then crossbred them with breeds with a gene for white feathers that was dominant. The first challenge was figuring out which breeds had the dominant white feather gene. The next was to begin selecting offspring with potential to create the Moonbeam traits.

Initially, perhaps 1 out of 5 would have potential. Successive generations increased the desired traits, but most often in hens, not roosters. Finally, she bred a rooster with Moonbeam colors. With it in the gene pool, she has reached a point where she is confident enough to begin selling Moonbeam fertilized eggs.

"I have sold some chicks or juveniles locally, but not yet formally introduced the breed," says Noll. "I'm hoping to sell more later this year."

Noll has selected for more than just black and white coloration. Productivity and personality are other important traits.



Moonbeam chicken breed has a black beak and black skin, with white feathers.

She hopes that breeders who buy her Moonbeams continue to select for the same combination.

"I choose hens that are good mothers and will only go broody a couple of times a year," says Noll. "They lay pretty well, producing a medium size egg with a cream color. I tried to make them a pretty all-around bird."

Noll has priced a dozen Moonbeam Chicken hatching eggs at \$50. She also raises and sells a number of other exotic chickens, ducks, peafowl, quail and pheasants.

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Business Is Booming For Rare Seeds, Plants

Thanks to the internet, it's becoming easier every year to find hundreds of rare heirloom native plants and exotic garden seeds from companies like Amkha Seed and One Green World. The companies are almost as unique as the plants they offer.

Amkha Seed is dedicated to heirloom and open-pollinated varieties. They specialize in what they describe as underappreciated food and utility crops from all over the world. Their crop research and breeding program is geared toward varieties requiring little to no inputs. They also offer Open-Source Seed Initiative (OSSI) pledged varieties from other breeders often not available from traditional seed companies.

Every section of the Amkha Seed catalog has surprises. Utility includes plants used for oils, medicines, insecticides and repellants, such as Roma tomatoes! The 160 plus herbs/spices include the Toothache plant. What Amkha doesn't tell you is that if chewed, it can make the inside of your mouth numb!

One Green World's website, on the other hand, is full of descriptions and detail. When it comes to unusual edible, fruiting shrubs, trees and groundcovers, few nurseries can match One Green World (OGW). The family-owned and operated nursery ships seedlings, rootstock and some seed to all 50 states.

Their 209 varieties of berries include 24 blackberries, 45 blueberries, and 5 Chilean guavas, as well as wintergreen, jostaberry,



Companies like Amkha Seed and One Green World specialize in rare heirloom native plants and exotic garden seeds.

sea berry, salmonberry, thimbleberry and whortleberry.

Other collections include 117 vines, 57 citrus varieties, 33 fruiting ground covers, and 57 fruiting shrubs. The latter includes a coffee plant for those who want to roast and brew their own coffee beans.

The 8 northwestern U.S. natives include the Oregon Grape, as well as ferns and the common Camas. The blue-flowered plant produces an edible bulb that can be roasted or boiled with a flavor reported to be similar to sweet potato, but sweeter.

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Better Butter Taste Builds Business Fast

Marie and Chad Miller credit their great tasting, cultured butter for their fast-growing business, Lofty Butter Co.

"We made our first batch of butter and had 75 glass jars packed and ready," recalls Marie Miller. "We planned to take them to the Warkworth Maple Syrup Festival. It was the first of 100 farmers markets and pop-up events we had planned."

They had spent months jumping through government hoops, whipping up test batches, making marketing plans, and crunching numbers. It was the middle of March 2020, during the first lock-down. The festival was cancelled, forcing the Millers to adapt.

"We went online and did a pop-up social media sale and sold out in 8 hrs.," says Miller. "We went full force with online sales and set up a delivery route for online orders of our butter, buttermilk and crème fraiche."

Delivery meant new hoops to jump through. While a recent legislative change allowed artisan dairy makers in Ontario, it limited how product could be sold. It had to go directly from the maker to the consumer.

To get butter to their buyers, the Millers worked with other independent businesses, including artisan bakers and coffee shops. They agreed to serve as pick-up points for Lofty Butter online customers. "We did some farmers markets in the summer, but most of our butter was sold online and delivered."

The entrepreneurs took another step on thin ice when they opened Lofty Kitchen Market & Cafe, a brick-and-mortar outlet for their business. They are selling out their current every-other-week butter production



Marie and Chad Miller in Ontario sell great tasting, cultured butter at a local shop and also online.

at the shop, causing them to abandon their delivery route.

Lofty Butter sells for \$9 (Canadian) per 5 ounces. The fresh cream comes from a source nearly 2 hrs. away. It is the only fresh cream they could find with no additives, something they believe makes their butter special.

Once they have the cream, they add 4 live cultures and let it sit for up to 5 days before churning out a 70-lb. batch. At that point they add flavors, from garlic to chili/lime and fruit to maple syrup.

Getting the highest quality ingredients and making the best tasting products is important to Miller. She knows it is at the root of their success.

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