



Barrett Orchards

– Tree-ripened Fruit and a Cherry Trail to Boot!

By Heather Clarke

COMBINE A FOURTH GENERATION FARMER with an expert interpretive guide and you've got yourself a powerful pair.

That pair, Mark and Cheryl Barrett, offers something no else in Washington does – an orchard with amazing fruit and an interpretive trail that tells the story of the fruit from their seed to your stomach.

The Barretts efforts began with growing fruit on their property and selling it at farmer's markets or fruit stands.

Cheryl was working part time for the Washington Fruit Commission where she managed the interpretive center in Yakima. When the center closed five years ago due to lack of funding, there were no hands on educational centers left in the state.

"People have always been interested in the process and they were always full of questions when they'd come out to our farm," shares Mark. "We found that with the interpretive center gone there was a huge need being unmet in the state."

The Barretts did extensive research on farms that direct market their fruit, even traveling up to Canada where they found that selling directly on the farm was working for dozens of farms.

"We found there were all kinds of farmers selling their fruit right off the farm to the consumer. Some were fancy, some were primitive and we thought – even though nobody's doing this here, 'we can do this'" said Mark.

This prompted the Barretts to purchase the gift shop portion of the center and move it to the middle of their orchard.

Five years later, Barrett Orchards has a very successful retail shop and nearly an acre dedicated to teaching people about cherry trees.

Their outdoor interpretive cherry trail has 11 different stations including everything from the pollination of a cherry tree, to information

Visitors at Barrett Orchards enjoy u-pick cherry time.

about the varieties, history of Bing and Rainier cherries, harvesting, water and irrigation and pest management. They offer tours to school groups and they've had groups come from as far as Illinois, Maine and Alabama to enjoy their cherries and learn about them too.

"People love the trail," shares Cheryl.

"They learn all kinds of things about tree fruit that they never realized before."

Cheryl's favorite part about offering the interpretive cherry trail is seeing children come through. "They always ask such interesting questions and it's great to see children learning."

Although most of their school tours are local, they get a fifth grade class from Oak Harbor, Washington that makes the trip every year. "Those kids aren't familiar with the farming industry and they are always so amazed to learn about how their fruit is grown."

The most common questions on the trail are about hand picking and frost control.

"People are always amazed to learn that we pick all our fruit by hand.

They assume a big machine is coming through and picking the fruit, so we always have lots of discussion about that," shares Cheryl.

"We also talk a lot about frost control and the various things we do to keep our orchard the right temperature."

While touring the orchard you can enjoy one of the Barrett's well-known and highly acclaimed tree-ripened fruits.

Tree-ripened means it stays on the tree until it is ripe for the picking, a tricky method that requires knowing the exact date to pick the fruit.

You don't find many tree-ripened orchards because it's such a careful process. All their fruit is hand-picked and packed in a box out in the field. It's taken quickly into a cold room where it is cooled off to preserve its flavor and freshness.

The Barretts direct sell most of their 15 acres of peaches, 12 acres of nectarines, and about 3 acres of apricots. And, although they direct sell the majority of their largest crop – 25 acres of cherries – they also send some of those cherries to packing houses that ship worldwide.

The peaches they grow include old-varieties such as Elberta.

"Elberta's are the number one canning peach and our number one seller," shares Mark. "We have people coming to take back truckloads to Montana, Idaho and Western Washington."

In their shop you can get a fresh fruit smoothie made from the tree-ripened fruit and ice, the perfect cold treat for a hot summer day and one that they've become known for.

The shop offers a huge inventory of Northwest specialty foods – all made in Washington or the Pacific Northwest. You can buy jams and salsas made from the fresh fruit grown on site, or find the perfect fruit themed gift or souvenir.

Whether it's planting or educational tours, there is always something going on at Barrett Orchards.

Mark your calendar to stop by during the Fourth of July weekend, for the annual Cherry Festival. You can partake in an old fashioned cherry pie eating contest that requires your hands behind your back. They also have a cherry pit spitting contest and hay rides.

"It's a fun day for the community," says Mark.

Every weekend in October, check out the Apple Harvest festival, complete with a hay maze, hay rides and a pumpkin patch. The Barretts have an original cider press from the 1800s and they bring in bins of apples for people



The Barrett's store is housed inside of the red barn, within easy walking distance of the picnic area.

to squeeze their own juice from.

One thing that is different from all their competitors is the Barrett's don't charge admission for their special events; they just put out a donation box and ask people give what they can.

"We just really want families to come out to our place, have fun and be involved," says Mark.

Mark estimates that during the peak of cherries and peaches about 60 percent of their customers are visitors and 40 percent are locals. They offer u-pick cherries and as many as 200 people a day come by during the peak season.

"I love to get my hands dirty and my wife loves meeting and teaching people about the history and process of farming," says Mark. "We like making people smile with what we grow."

Cheryl adds, "We love what we do, we are proud of our industry. We think growing fruit is an amazing process and we are so fortunate to see it through from start to finish."

Stop by Barrett Orchards and enjoy a cold smoothie, a delicious cherry and a trip through the interpretive trail. Barrett Orchards is located at 1209 Pecks Canyon Road in Yakima. They are currently open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m.-6 p.m. and Saturday from 9a.m.-5p.m. Once harvesting starts, they will also be open on Sundays from 11 a.m.-4 p.m.

You can learn more about Barrett Orchards by visiting <http://www.treeripened.com/>. ■

Mark and Cheryl's grandson Josiah holding one of Grandpa's famous peaches.

