

# 2011 Fall Fruit Festival

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Anticipation was in the air as we joined other families arriving at Cloud Mountain Farm Center for the second day of their Fall Fruit Festival. Almost immediately my grandson was recruited to try turning the wheel on the apple chopper for the hand cider press. The fun was underway!



You may have noticed that Cloud Mountain Farm is now Cloud Mountain Farm Center. A non-profit organization was created which recently purchased the farm. It's becoming an educational and training center for market farmers and consumers. Tom and Cheryl Thornton, who have farmed at Cloud Mountain for 30 years, will continue to lead the way as staff. The Center will build on education programs already developed by the Thorntons, and expand into areas such as market development, the business of farming, and issues affecting market agriculture. Watch for open house events this fall and next spring to learn more, or email: [info@cloudmountainfarm.com](mailto:info@cloudmountainfarm.com)

I spoke with Cheryl about the changes, and she laughed. "The first thing most people ask is if these Fall Fruit Festivals will continue to be held each year," she said. "The answer is absolutely yes!" She went on to say that more things will also continue unchanged. Cloud Mountain will continue to grow their existing crops (orchards, vegetables, and vineyards) and the retail nursery will continue to operate as usual. Sustainable agriculture practices will go on, including continuing transitioning the vegetables to organic, and sustainable soil and pest management programs for fruit crops.

Perhaps the biggest change is that Tom and Cheryl now feel their work will be carried on whenever they decide to retire. For the time being, prospective new farmers will continue to benefit from their knowledge and experience through the Center's expanding workshop programs. And that means all of us will benefit as our local food system continues to develop.

While I learned about the Center, my family was checking out the kids activities. I moved toward the tasting tables where over 200 varieties of apples were being sampled. It's amazing how diverse the flavors are, yet all are clearly apples. If you're considering fruit trees in your yard, these annual fall tastings can help you make decisions about



which varieties to purchase. Staff can answer questions about productivity, pest management, and other growing techniques. Many of the varieties are available as standard items from Cloud Mountain's nursery, and they can custom propagate others.

Even the names of some of the varieties are intriguing. My favorite this year was Westfield Seek-No-Further. Karmijn de Sonneville is one of the best apples for storing, starting out with intense and tart flavors and mellowing with time. Kingston Black, classed as bittersharp, is a favorite cider variety.

Besides apples, another tasting table had grapes (such as the delectable Lynden Blue for the table and the very tart Sauvignon Blanc 01 wine variety). For pears, Doyenne du Julienne was especially delicious. Next were less common fruits for this area (hops, paw paws, persimmons, aronia, akebia, etc.) and then lots of luscious berries. The North Country dwarf blueberry was my personal favorite. Finally, there were dozens of pepper varieties, both sweet and hot. I'll let others make pepper recommendations. I'm not a very daring pepper taste tester.

At this point I ran into County Councilmember Ken Mann and his family. Turns out he is also an avid local eating enthusiast!

A final table displayed samples of the work of Krista Rome, director of the Backyard Bean and Grain Project. She and her partner are doing a lot of experimenting and field trials to find varieties of dried beans and grains which grow reliably in our area. As their work evolves, they have begun selling the seeds they produce, and they offer hands-on volunteer opportunities for people who want to learn how to thresh grains and dry beans for home use. Also, early next year they plan to begin selling CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) shares. Shareholders will pay a fixed amount in the spring (the amount is yet to be determined) and in the fall they will pick up a winter supply of beans and grains already cleaned and ready to store. I'm very excited about the idea—watch this column early next year for more details.

Lots of other activities were also available. Mallard's Ice Cream served special Cloud Mountain flavors, such as Aronia, Apple Pie, Plum and Pumpkin. Bridge (so named because they "bridge" several musical genres) had people dancing to their music on the lawn. Spending relaxing time with family and friends in a beautiful rural setting made the day perfect.

It's easy to see why people want to ensure the Fall Farm Festival is held for many more years to come!

This week's main dish recipe features Cloud Mountain's tangy apple cider.