

juicy fruit

Impeccable peaches require patience. | by Melody Moss

A peach is so delicate," says Jeff Herman, co-owner with wife Jeanette of northeastern Washington's Cliffside Orchard. "If it's picked too green it may ripen," notes Jeanette, "but it will never develop that full flavor."

Mass-market peaches are typically picked up to a month early to avoid bruising during handling. By contrast the Hermans try to bring their organic tree-ripened peaches to farmers markets within three to five days of picking, harvesting two or three times from each tree to ensure each peach is picked only when it has reached optimal ripeness. Their peaches also have a consistently higher sugar content than mass-market peaches. Jeanette relates, "There are so many people at the farmers markets who say, 'Oh yeah, this is what a peach is supposed to taste like!'"

Though they first planted their orchard 24 years ago, Cliffside Orchard began selling produce direct to consumers only recently. The Hermans were organic long before "organic" was a household word—their orchard was one of the first in the state to be certified—so they relied heavily on wholesalers. But about five years ago Jeff started selling at farmers markets in Spokane and Coeur d'Alene, and Jeanette now covers Seattle's U-District and West Seattle markets. "The more people found out about us and got to know us, the more people wanted to buy from us," Jeanette says. They've transformed their business from 90 percent wholesale to 90 percent direct sales.

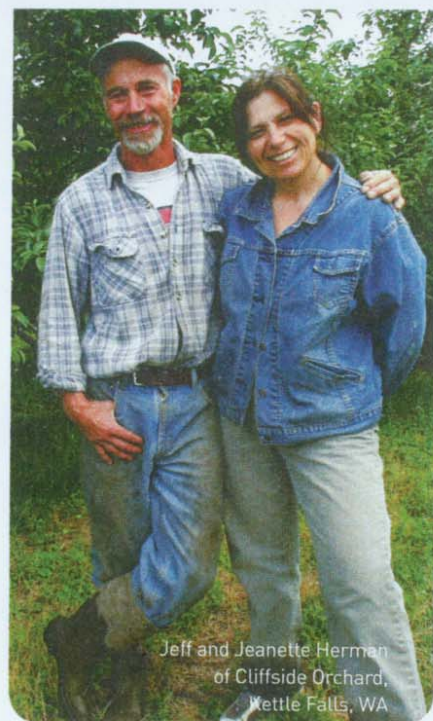
Their slogan "Organic Fruit Grown on the Edge" indicates at once the Hermans' precocious ambition for organic farming; their

desire to offer fully ripened peaches, nectarines, pears, apricots, cherries, apples, and plums; and more literally, their northeastern Washington location near a cliff overlooking Lake Roosevelt, 13 miles from downtown Kettle Falls.

Jeff and Jeanette weren't born farmers. They are both from Maryland, but they didn't meet until the mid-1970s in Northern California. While attending the College of the Redwoods in Humboldt County, Jeanette lived in a communal vegetarian household where she learned about organic farming. Jeff, who'd hitchhiked across the country to look at colleges and settled into orchard work with friends in Washington's Wenatchee Valley, knew some of Jeanette's housemates and happened to visit when it was her turn to cook dinner. That's when he first fell for his future bride.

They ran into each other again after Jeanette moved to the Wenatchee Valley to work on an orchard, and the couple eventually married in 1978. The Hermans loved the orchards—but not the ubiquitous pesticides. So they planned to start an orchard of their own far from the sprays of the state's larger farms. "We wanted to come to a place that was clean for organics, and we wanted a nice place for our daughters," says Jeanette.

In 1979 the Hermans bought their 40-acre plot about a mile away from Lake Roosevelt. With a 10-month-old in tow they moved onto their property in 1980 the day before Mount St. Helens erupted and covered much of the state in ashfall. "We couldn't even see the river; we could see maybe a



Jeff and Jeanette Herman
of Cliffside Orchard,
Kettle Falls, WA

FIND YOUR TYPE

There are hundreds of varieties of peaches, including nectarines (basically hairless varieties of the same species). Peaches are divided into freestones, clingstones, and semi-freestones, referring to how tightly the flesh adheres to the stone, or pit. Cliffside Orchard currently offers seven varieties:

Early Red Haven clingstone Available first half of August

Red Haven semi-freestone Available second half of August. Tends to be a favorite due to its less acidic flavor, fuzzy red exterior, and tender but not mealy yellow interior. The most reliable of the varieties; grows equally well in Georgia and northern Washington.

Roza, Red Globe, Suncrest, Cresthaven, and Blazing Star freestones Available during September

WHERE TO BUY

Cliffside Orchard peaches are available at **University District Farmers Market** (NE 50th St & University Way NE; Saturdays 9–2) and **West Seattle Farmers Market** (SW Alaska St & California Ave SW; Sundays 10–2, starting mid-September). See also www.seattlefarmersmarkets.org.

For further details on locating **Cliffside Orchard's** products, or to schedule a farm visit, contact **Jeff and Jeanette Herman** (509-738-6165; jherman@plix.com).



peach ice cream sandwiches

Recipe courtesy chef Sue McCown, *Coco la ti da*

COOKIE INGREDIENTS

- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 1 cup dark brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons granulated white sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup unsulphured molasses
- 1 large egg
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons ground ginger
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons ground cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground pepper (optional)
- 3 tablespoons candied/crystallized ginger (optional)
- Zest of 1 lemon (optional)

MAKES
10-12
SERVINGS

PREP TIME
2
HOURS

DIRECTIONS

Ice cream: In a blender, puree 3 cups of peaches. Set aside the other 2 cups of diced peaches. In a large bowl, whisk together eggs, sugar, flour, vanilla, and salt until well blended, and set aside. In a large, heavy saucepan, heat milk and cream over low heat, just until it starts to steam. Pour about 3 tablespoons of the heated liquid into the egg mixture and stir to temper the eggs and avoid curdling. Then pour the egg mixture into the heavy saucepan. Continue to cook over low heat, stirring constantly until thick and smooth. Remove from heat and refrigerate for several hours or until well chilled.

Add pureed peaches to chilled mixture, stir well, and pour into a 5-quart ice cream freezer can. Turn on ice cream freezer, or crank by hand for 5 minutes. Carefully remove top of can and dasher. Add reserved 2 cups of diced peaches, mixing them in with a long spoon. Replace dasher and top, and continue freezing according to manufacturer's directions.

Cookies: Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line two baking sheets with parchment. Place butter and brown sugar in electric mixer. Use paddle attachment to cream until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add molasses, egg, vanilla extract, candied ginger, and lemon zest, and mix until incorporated. Sift together flour, baking soda, salt, and spices. Add to butter mixture and stir until well combined. Form dough into 1-inch balls and place on baking sheets. Flatten slightly with the bottom of a lightly flour-dusted glass. Sprinkle cookies with granulated white sugar. Bake 8 to 10 minutes or until cookies feel dry and firm on top. Cool on a wire rack. Place a scoop of ice cream between two cookies and gently press together.

*This recipe requires an ice cream freezer. Alternatively, premade peach ice cream can be purchased (Häagen-Dazs peaches & cream is a good option). Just add diced ripe peaches.

ICE CREAM INGREDIENTS*

- 5 cups ripe peaches, peeled and diced, small
- 6 large eggs, lightly beaten, at room temperature
- 2 cups granulated white sugar
- $2\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup red wine vinegar or sherry vinegar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup olive oil
- 4 cups whole milk
- 3 cups heavy cream
- dash salt

couple hundred feet," recalls Jeanette. "I had the Volkswagen packed up and was ready to move north to Canada!" She was convinced to stay put, however, and the Hermans moved into a workshop on their otherwise bare plot, where they lived for the three years it took to create a comfortable home and a working orchard.

The biggest immediate challenge the couple faced was irrigation: They didn't have ready-made irrigation ditches as in the Wenatchee Valley. After getting the proper permits, says Jeanette, "Jeff had to dig a line from our place all the way to Lake Roosevelt."

When the Hermans planted their seven-acre orchard, with two and a half devoted to peaches, there were only a couple other organic orchards in the immediate vicinity. They had been told by field extension agents—and nearly all the other growers they knew at the time—that running an economically viable organic orchard wasn't possible. But they forged ahead. They would come to rely on "beneficials," or insects, like lacewings, ladybugs, and wasps, helpful in controlling pests. They would treat brown rot, a fungus, with sulfur and control peach twig borer with *Bacillus thuringiensis*, a natural bacterium; they would fertilize trees with seaweed, clover, and compost.

Cliffside Orchard is about as far north as peaches can be successfully raised commercially, because of the short growing season, and although the hot days and cold nights contribute to the fruits' flavor, weather has been the most unpredictable challenge for all of the Hermans' crops. A hailstorm in August 1992 wiped out all of their peaches, pears, and apples. Last fall the weather turned cold unusually early, which may have affected the trees' bud formation. Most likely this will impact only the number of peaches, not their quality or size. The trees are periodically trimmed: "You want your peaches to be at least five inches apart," says Jeanette, "so that they can size up. The peaches that are on the trees now will be really big. You'll have fewer but bigger peaches."

The fruit that looks the best after the Hermans' nearly six-hour drive to Seattle will sell for around \$3 per pound, while the just-as-tasty "seconds," with minor bruising, go for half that (request in advance). Purveyors know size, color, and feel can vary, and smell and taste are the surest signs of ripeness, so many offer free samples. Be prepared for the fountains of juice that gush from a truly ripe peach.

Because of Cliffside Orchard's northern locale, the farm's peaches need more time to ripen. They arrive in local markets about three to four weeks after the same varieties from the Wenatchee and Yakima Valleys are gone. Anticipation can heighten people's love for the peaches when they eventually appear, and the customers seem to appreciate the delay. "We cater to procrastinators," Jeanette jokes. 🌸