



Program seeks safe disposal of pesticides

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS
BDN STAFF

Got pesticides and are unsure of what to do with them? A state program aims to help, by allowing Mainers to dispose of banned or unusable pesticides next month at sites in Presque Isle, Bangor, Augusta and Portland.

According to the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry's Board of Pesticides Control, it's not unusual for homeowners and farmers to sometimes discover old, unusable or obsolete pesticides in the shed, garage or cellar.

Products lauded as marvels in their day, such as DDT and compounds of arsenic, mercury or lead, are now banned because of the risks they pose to human health, wildlife or the environment. In other cases, still-legal pesticides can freeze or get damp and solidify, which renders them unusable. But disposing of these

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substances can be hard. It's not allowed to just take them to the transfer station and people who want to do the right thing by disposing of them in an environmentally sound manner can often be discouraged to learn that this type of disposal can be very expensive, according to the website for the Maine Board of Pesticides Control.

That's why state officials make it possible each October to do the free pesticide drop-off at locations around the state.

"It's important for the protection of public, wildlife and environmental health that these products are dealt with properly and not thrown in the trash or down the drain, where they can contaminate land and water resources, including drinking water," Commissioner Walt Whitcomb of the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry said recently in a media release.

Through the program, the collected chemicals will be taken to out-of-state disposal facilities that are licensed by the Environmental Protection Agency. There, they will be incinerated or reprocessed, according to the Maine Board of Pesticides Control.

The collection program is jointly sponsored by the Board of Pesticides Control and the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, and is funded by pesticide product registration fees. According to the pesticide control board, the program has kept more than 90 tons of pesticides out of the waste stream since it began in 1982.

Participants must register by Saturday, Sept. 26, as drop-ins are not allowed. To register or to find more information about the program, please call 287-2731 or visit the website www.maine.gov/dacf/php/pesticides for details.

Wild about hops



Craft beer craze grows demand for new crop

BY ANTHONY BRINO
BDN STAFF

New England farmers gave up on hops around the Great Depression, and today even the most local of breweries get the bitter flowers from the Pacific Northwest or Europe.

That's starting to change with the rise of a multibillion dollar craft beer industry, as more entrepreneurs are inspired to try growing the hops-producing *Humulus lupulus* plant — a difficult task, in terms of meeting craft beer quality.

"Most of the hops I've had from New England are horrible," said Ed Stebbins, co-founder of Gritty McDuff's Brewing Company. "I wouldn't brew with them."

Since opening in 1988, Gritty's has usually sourced about half of its hops from the Pacific Northwest and half from Europe, but this year, almost 5 percent is coming from Aroostook Hops, an organic farm in Westfield run by Krista Delahunty and Jason Johnston, two biologists who teach at the University of Maine at Presque Isle.

"Hops is a good combination of hard work and a lot of thinking," said Johnston, a Mapleton native and Bowdoin College graduate who started home brewing in the late 1990s.

After they moved to Westfield in 2007, around a national hops shortage, Delahunty and Johnston decided to experiment, knowing Aroostook's soil and northern geography were right for the climbing perennial plant, which grows more than a dozen feet tall on trellises.

Today, they have one mature acre with five varieties of hops and three 4-year-old acres envisioned for an expansion in the coming years. Gritty's, Allagash and other breweries buy



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A group of Bowdoin College students (top) stand at the edge of Aroostook Hops' 1-acre plot in Westfield recently. Krista Delahunty (above) of Aroostook Hops opens up a resinous hops cone in Westfield recently.



ANTHONY BRINO | BDN
Hops plants grow high on a trellis at Aroostook Hops in Westfield.

their fresh hops for wet-hop ales — a "grassy" tasting beer, as Allagash brewmaster Jason Perkins put it.

"Hop growing involves a lot of investment financially," said Delahunty, who's originally from St. John's, Newfoundland. Recently, they've purchased a mechanical harvester (replacing volunteers of college students and community members who've helped pick the thousands of flowers) as well as a drying rack and pelletizer machine to sell in the main wholesale market.

"It's definitely a business," added Johnston. "It's not a hobby."

Growing hops is big business in the Pacific Northwest, valued at more than \$200 million in Washington State, where farmers harvest about 28,000 acres, or 70 percent of the total U.S. hops crop, according to Hops Growers of America. Oregon farmers grew more than 5,000 acres, Idahoans grew

some 3,740 acres, Michigan farmers cultivated a modest 300 acres, and New Yorkers grew 150.

In Maine, Aroostook Hops along with the Hop Yard in Gorham were the two main commercial hops growers, contributing about 10 acres last year.

"We do weekend trips up and bang out two weeks worth of work in two days," said

Peter Busque, one of four partners in the Hop Yard, which has fields in Gorham and Fort Fairfield. Busque is a computer engineer at Cisco and his other partners also have full-time jobs, but he said they could soon have a paid employee. "We want this to be a commercial business."

Picking up where another generation left off

The Massachusetts Company first brought hops from Europe
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Common Ground fosters sharing

Annual country fair set for Sept. 25-27

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE
BDN STAFF

UNITY — Cooking over fire. Building a yurt. Rooftop beekeeping.

The Common Ground Country Fair, held Sept. 25-27, is much more than a celebration of all things organic. Run by Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, the fair, which attracts 60,000 people to Unity every autumn, transports a distracted society back to earth.

Homesteading skills employed by European settlers in the 17th century and practiced today by urban and so-called suburbanists are front and center. These folk arts, many considered traditional Maine skills such as blacksmithing, go hand in hand with farming and are honored all weekend.

"There is no such thing as the rugged individual," Anu Dudley, the fair's folk arts coordinator, said. "We have to depend on the community and help one another."

To demonstrate that bond, experts with an array of primitive skills share all weekend. Demonstrations, such as the traditional underground simmer of bean hole beans, are emblematic of the fair, which began in 1977.

The downhome delicacy, derived from "lumber camps in the winter, where you had to feed lots of extremely hungry lumberjacks," said Dudley, is an early slow food.

"You use the ground for the oven. A bean hole is dug 3 or 4 feet deep and is lined with stones." Next a fire is built, and a pot of parboiled beans are buried alive. They cook for 24 hours, and "you get a fantastic pot of beans." Three times during the fair the public will have the opportunity to try pork or vegetable beans culled piping hot from the earth.

"It's a great place to learn," Michael Douglas, director of adult programs at Maine Primitive Skills School and central to the fair's folk art offerings, said. "Every time I go, it's like ... the first time I went."

Amid the 700 talks and demos, education abounds.

Douglas will be leading medicinal walks on the fairgrounds to empower people to heal themselves through nature.

"On the plant walks we see trees and shrubs used through the seasons for food and medicine," Douglas said.

The walks help people better understand their backyards, which vegetation attracts deer and mosquitos and how what you plant impacts the environment.

He will teach people to make hunting bows out of trees as well as tracking and awareness skills. Throughout these workshops and presentations, Douglas

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ABOUT A HOUSE

Searsport homestead has few amenities, but lots of comfort

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS
BDN STAFF

SEARSPORT — Erica Buswell and Scott Giroux live miles away from busy Route 1, in a serene 2-acre clearing in the woods that is dotted with garden plots and small wooden buildings.

It's not fancy — the married couple share a 240-square-foot house, an outhouse with a composting toilet and an open-air outdoors shower that they use from April to October. Their water comes from a spring, and solar panels on their tiny house provide just enough electricity to run a refrigerator, lights, their coffee grinder and a laptop computer.

But it is home, and it is exactly the way they want to live.

"We joke, but it's true, that we have a very comfortable second world lifestyle," Buswell, who works at the Maine Farmland Trust in Belfast, said recently while giving a tour of the homestead they call Co-Efficient Farm. "We just love it here, especially as it's evolving."

Giroux, a builder who runs Bog Hill Woodworking, his fine carpentry and green home construction business out of another building in the clearing, found the 37-acre property in 1997.

"He moved out here in a tent in May. It snowed the first night,"
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ERICAS L. CONTI | BDN
Erica Buswell stands in front of the house she shares with husband, Scott Giroux, in Searsport. They live in a simple, old-fashioned way on their piece of land where Giroux has built all the structures on the property.