

A Visit to Gold Ridge Organic Farms

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By foodgal



Asian pear apples grown at Gold Ridge Farms. (Photo by Carolyn Jung)

Farmer Brooke Hazen knows every tree planted on his 88 acres in the rolling hills of Sebastopol. Not in the “Hi! How are you?” kind of way, he jokes. But in the truest sense of nurtured familiarity, having planted each and every one of them with the help of only one assistant.

He started his Gold Ridge Organic Farms in 2001 to create an edible wonderland. He's more than succeeded, growing 13,000 olive trees of Spanish, Italian and French cultivars; 12,000 apple trees of 75 different varieties, including rare heirlooms; and a smattering of citrus, including Blood Oranges and Mandarin-Kumquats. All are grown organically, too.

You may very well know his apples already from his branded bags of Heirloom Apple Blend that are sold at Northern California Whole Foods. These treasure bags can contain such unusual antique varieties as Pitmaster Pineapple that actually tastes like pineapple, and Strawberry Parfait that — yes — tastes like strawberry. Indeed, Gold Ridge is one of the largest heirloom apple growers in California.



Farmer Brooke Hazen. (Photo by Dawn Heumann)

This month, you can get the opportunity to visit this wonderful farm for the first time.

After the pandemic quashed Gold Ridge's plans to host public events last year, it's now finally geared up for its first Harvest Open House, Nov. 5 and Nov. 6.



Honeycrisp grown at Gold Ridge Farms. (Photo by Carolyn Jung)



Mandarin-Kumquat. Like an overgrown kumquat, it's about the size of a Cutie. You eat the entire thing — peel and flesh. (Photo by Carolyn Jung)

You'll get a chance to taste four award-winning olive oils, and see the Italian Rapini olive press and mill, which actually acts like a centrifuge to more gently separate the oil from the olives.

This is a free event. Because there is limited parking, advance reservations are required. Masks also are required inside the tasting salon. Register [here](#).

If you can't make it to that open house, Gold Ridge is also hosting a fun shopping event for the holidays, Nov. 27 and Nov. 28.



The tasting salon. (Photo by Carolyn Jung)

You'll again get a chance to sample the olive oils and view the olive mill. You'll also get to shop for olive oils, farm-grown citrus, dried apples, and apple syrup, as well as locally made soaps and lotions made with Gold Ridge extra virgin olive oil and fragrant botanicals.

This is also a free event that requires advanced registration due to parking constraints, as well as the wearing of masks indoors. Register [here](#).



Gold Ridge's Heirloom Apple Blend bags can be found at Northern California Whole Foods markets.
(Photo courtesy of Gold Ridge Farms)

When it comes to apples, Gold Ridge grows primarily Fuji and Honeycrisp, which pop with potent sweetness and flavor, owing to the fact that unlike most apples sold these days in supermarkets, these never go into cold storage for longer preservation. Instead, Hazen picks them and sends them to stores immediately.

The farm's cool coastal climate also benefits the olives. They ripen so slowly that he's one of the last olive oil producers to press each season, waiting until mid-November to start.



Gold Ridge organic olive oils pressed with estate-grown citrus. (Photo by Carolyn Jung)



Tasting olive oils. (Photo by Carolyn Jung)

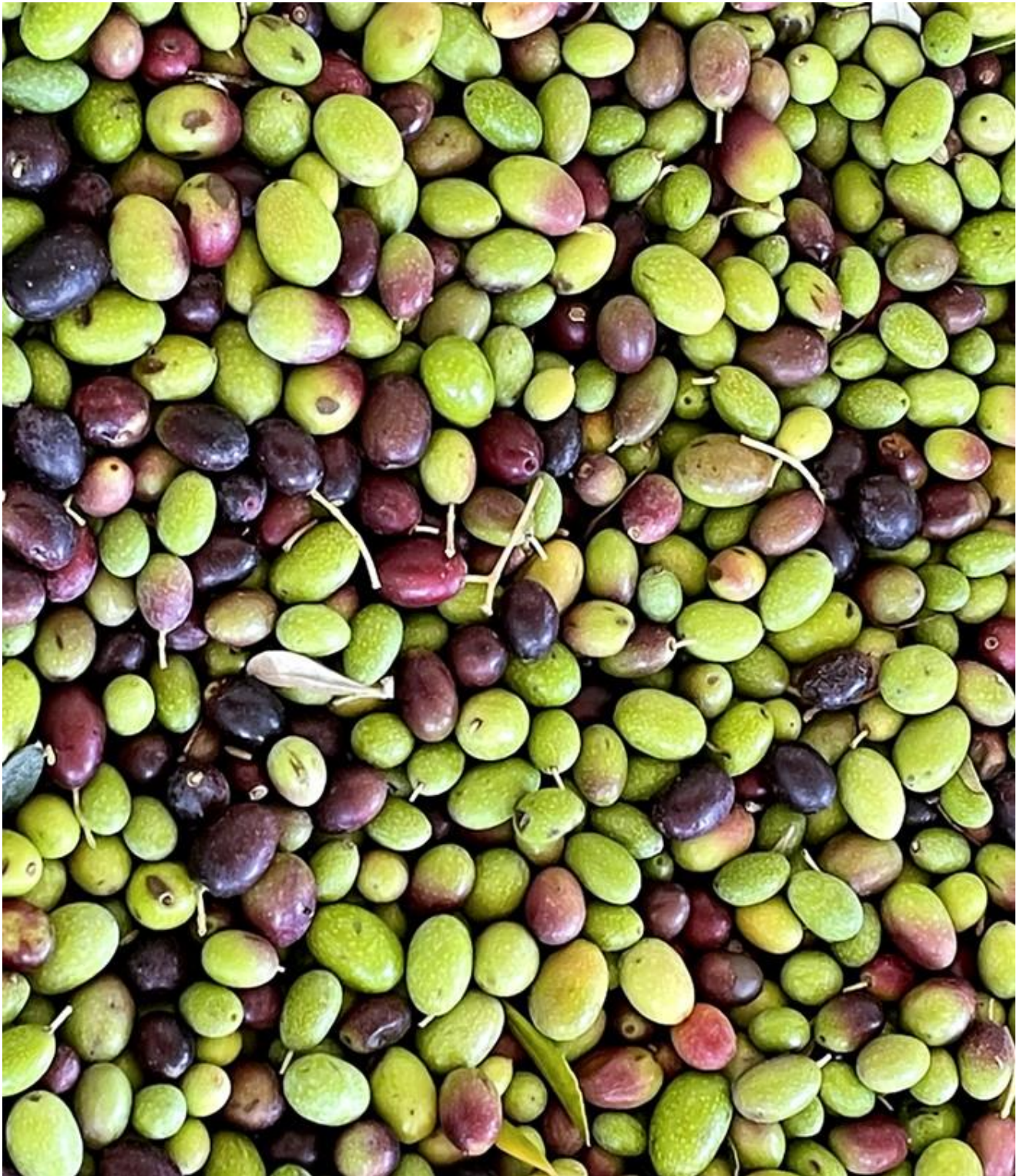
That extended time gives the olives more time to develop nuanced flavors. In fact, at a media event last week, the extra virgin oils I sampled were so robust that it was hard to believe they had been pressed a year ago.

The Minerva Blend boasted the pepperiness of arugula and white pepper with a hint of green tea. The Picholine Blend had a super spicy kick like dandelion greens, plus a long finish. And the Mandarin-Kumquat Organic Olive Oil possessed a beautiful floral-orange perfume to it, as well as an intense rounded citrus taste with touch of bitter pith and spicy white pepper.



The farm car. And yes, that's all hand-painted. (Photo by Carolyn Jung)

Some olive oil producers pick their olives on the green side to create an oil with high levels of polyphenols, naturally occurring antioxidants, But Hazen can wait to press until his olives are riper, sporting a blush 3/4 of the way around, and still end up with oils high in polyphenols and more pronounced fruitiness.



Stephen Singer's olives ready to be pressed. (Photo by Carolyn Jung)

In addition to pressing his own estate olives, Hazen also custom mills for 150 olive oil clients, including Forestville's [Olive Queen](#), and on the day I visited, for winemaker Stephen Singer, the ex-husband of [Chez Panisse's](#) Alice Waters.

If you're looking for a change of pace from the usual wine-tasting, trek on over to Gold Ridge to savor a delicious time of a different sort.

