



**MADE LOCAL**  
M A G A Z I N E

## Grow Local – Stay Gold

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### *Stay Gold*

## Gold Ridge Farms Serves Up Summer Heirloom Apple Tastings

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Photo: Dawn Heumann

One might not describe an apple as “attitudinal.” But Brooke Hazen of Gold Ridge Organic Farms does. In part, he’s referring to the flavor expression of hard-to-find apples like the Pitmaston Pineapple, Strawberry Parfait, Cinnamon Spice, and Winter Banana—all heirloom varieties which, Hazen affirms, taste like their namesakes.

A “attitudinal” heirloom of note for him is the Pink Pearl. “It’s punchy with a flavor so startling it’s like a shot of caffeine, both tart and sweet, and shocking in its visual attributes,” he describes, “with vivacious, fantastical, surreal colors, from its lime green and white pearl skin to its bright pink flesh once you bite into it.”

Perched atop a ridge above Blucher Creek in Sebastopol, between the coastal and Santa Rosa valleys, Gold Ridge occupies a stunning piece of earth. When Hazen bought the land at the turn of the century, it

was acres of grazing land for cattle with a barn and a house. “A complete blank palette for me to paint on.”

What he created is a certified organic farm with both fruits and fats. Hazen grows roughly 13,000 apple trees, which, thanks to the smaller and tighter spacing of his dwarf stock, comprise just 18 of the total 88 acres of farm. The other 70 acres are given over to the same number of olive trees.

Under Hazen’s purview, Gold Ridge picks and sells a million apples a year. Though 90% of his crop are the crowd-pleasing Honeycrisp and Fuji varieties, he’s given the other 10% over to heirloom varieties, some from as far back as the 1500s, and they are the apples he is most passionate about.

The apple-curious can see for themselves at the Ultimate Heirloom Apple Tasting Experience, kicking off August 2 and running every Friday and Saturday through the end of the Heirloom season in October, and at the Gravenstein Apple Fair’s Artisan Tasting Alley, August 10 and 11. Hazen cultivates some 75 different heirloom varieties, many of which visitors will be able to sample, including Ashmead’s Kernel of 1700s England, tied for favorite with his beloved Pink Pearl, bred in 1944 by Albert Etter of Humboldt, a contemporary of Luther Burbank.

“We’re aiming to put the culture back into agriculture,” says Hazen, explaining the impetus behind the tastings. “I want to educate the community, so they see that these apples are not just a piece of fruit on a shelf, it’s an entire history and tasting experience.” Not only will participants get to taste and leave with a bag filled with choice heirlooms, but they have the option of roaming the rows with the farmer himself. And don’t miss their monthly pizza events with wood-fired pizzas made by guest chefs on site.



*Photos: Gold Ridge Organic Farm*



Photo: Dawn Heumann

And for something more to look forward to, weekends in November and December, Gold Ridge hosts Olio Nuovo (literally “new oil”) tastings, which include the Tuscan, Picholine, and Minerva blends, and sometimes even custom creations, like a Meyer lemon and mandarin-kumquat olive oil, made by co-milling the organic orchard fruit with his olives. (A few citrus trees also grow at Gold Ridge.) Find bottles of their award-winning olive oils along with their signature apple cider vinegars and syrups for sale in the farm store.

Of the olive tree, Hazen says, “It’s the most rewarding, beautiful, graceful tree in all of the plant kingdom,” and it’s the farm’s focus once fall arrives—when 21 varieties of olives are cold pressed in the Italian Rapanelli mill to produce anywhere from two to four thousand gallons of consistently award-winning olive oil. As one of the only olive mills around, Hazen also presses for about 100 other growers, some coming from as far away as Oregon.



One key to outstanding olive oil is attention to the time between harvest and press: the less oxidation, the better the taste, the higher the concentration of those antioxidants known as polyphenols. At Gold Ridge, that time is merely hours. Their resulting extra virgin olive oils received several accolades this year, including the young, grassy Tuscan Blend which won Gold Awards at both the prestigious New York International Olive Oil Competition (NYIOOC) and the California State Fair.

Though Hazen's deep tan this early in the season is testament to the time he spends with his trees—having dug each and every hole himself—he is quick to bestow gratitude elsewhere.

“I credit the climate,” he says. “It’s the single biggest factor that determines quality, even more than soil. With the cool ocean breezes and nice amount of sun, it’s the perfect lab environment to coax out the nuances,

tastes, and colors of this fruit.” He inhales deeply and sweeps his hand across the acreage. “Luther Burbank wasn’t joking when he said this was the best climate on earth.”

## 2024 Events:

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August-October | **Ultimate Heirloom Apple Tasting Experience** on Fridays and Saturdays

July 13 | **Pizza Pop-Up With Boonville Barn Collective**

August 10 – August 11 | **51st Annual Gravenstein Apple Fair, Artisan Tasting Alley**

August 17 | **Pizza Pop-Up with a special Guest Chef**

September 14 | **3rd Annual Heirloom Apple Celebration**

**[goldridgeorganicfarms.com](http://goldridgeorganicfarms.com)**

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