

Growing a reputation - Brattleboro Reformer

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DUMMERSTON - A well-known New England-centric publication has named Walker Farm in Dummerston as one of the five best nurseries in the region. In its March and April edition, currently on sale now, Yankee Magazine names Walker Farm one of the top nurseries and garden centers in New England. Gardening author Tovah Martin made the selections, which were announced on March 8.

Martin is a known customer at Walker Farm, according to owners Karen and Jack Manix.

"She comes up from Connecticut and shops here, and she mentioned something about it but we were like, 'Sure, that would be nice,'" said Jack, referring to the magazine's selection. "Then, Yankee sent us notification, so it was kind of a surprise, it was nice."

The selection is a great honor leading up to their seasonal reopening on April 6, he said.

"We're really fortunate to be in an area that has some of the top gardeners in the country, I think," Jack continued. "Gardeners are very self-sufficient toward food, but also they need the flowers to feed their spirit as well as feed their bodies."

According to Martin, Walker Farm is a one-stop shop for "humdrum-busting annuals." The article continues: "Where else are you going to find ... 21 types of eggplants?"

And the Manix family is very proud of their variety, said Jack.

"We never see a plant we don't like. Who is going to be crazy enough to plant 100 varieties of heirloom tomatoes? Or who is going to be crazy enough to do all the trees and shrubs that [Karen] does, so it's the variety," he said.

Oh, and that's not including the 30 different types of peppers or new incoming melons, ginger or string beans.

Karen Manix said it's a pleasant sickness "you get interested in and you love and it rewards you." "I love to get that something unusual," she said. "It's always fun."

The Walker Farm is more than 200 years old, finding a good location near the Connecticut River with fertile soil. After it was in the ownership of the Miller family, the property was sold to Abial A. Walker in 1835.

For generations, the land remained within the family raising everything from cows and sheep to tobacco and vegetables. And in 1973, Jack Walker Manix married Karen (Jensen) in an outdoor ceremony on the farm, and soon became part of its long history.

Even with the added attention coming from Yankee, Walker Farm will not branch out into major metropolitan areas anytime soon. Quite the opposite in fact.

"We've been trying to simplify for 20 years, but we're going in the other direction," Karen said.

Jack agreed, saying they are comfortable staying at the farm's current size, which includes 30 acres of organic produce for their farmstand, roughly 30 employees at the height of the season and 20 greenhouses (10 for flowers and 10 for certified organics).

"We're just looking to take care of our customer base that we have now," he said. And the customers appreciate it is a family-owned farm, oftentimes looking to challenge the farm with dropping off a flower cutting from San Francisco or fruit seeds from Italy.

"As we grew, our customers' knowledge grew and we just worked together," said Jack.

Martin also selected Cady's Falls Nursery of Morrisville, Snug Harbor Farm of Kennebunk, Maine, Nasami Farm Native Plant Nursery of Whately, Mass., and Broken Arrow Nursery of Hamden, Conn., as the top garden centers in 2012.

On the Web: - yankeemagazine.com - walkerfarm.com.

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