



Local FLAVOR



Oneota Co-op welcomes local apples from Pinter's Gardens & Pumpkins to the store. Multiple varieties of conventionally-grown apples from this Decorah producer are available. We recently spoke with Dustin Deeny of Pinter's; Deeny is the organization's garden manager and facilitates day to day apple harvest processes.

OCC: There's a lot going on at Pinter's! How, why and when did apples come into the picture?

Pinter's: Owners Shane and Elisa Pinter have always had a hand in hobby farming while running a full-time landscaping and baking company. When the decision was made to build and open at our current location in 2011, it was a "no-brainer" to expand that love and start planting apple trees. Each year we add to our orchards and the business itself, and are always looking for ways to combine the different aspects of our business...such as keeping orchards, fields and gardens photograph-quality at all times for our guests that come to us for their weddings and other events.

OCC: How old are your orchards and how are apple varieties chosen?

Pinter's: Our orchards were established in 2016. We have six acres of orchards at our 2475 State Hwy. 9 location, with over 5700 trees and more than 23 varieties of apples. Many of our varieties are University of Minnesota introductions, or sports of these. The U of M breeding program is famous for creating some of the best apple varieties in the world, including the popular Honeycrisp. Their varieties are proven hardy, high quality and high yielding.

OCC: Are there any specific farming practices you'd like to share with us?

Pinter's: While we are responsible with our chemical usage, and only apply when absolutely necessary, we don't shy away from not being organic. Growing apples is challenging enough, and we're in awe of those that can do it successfully while being 100% organic and still profitable. We are always looking for ways we can improve our processes and mitigate our effect

on our land, and to educate ourselves and our customers on chemical usage, whether in the orchard, garden or landscape.

OCC: We welcome hearing the specifics of your growth, and harvest, season.

Pinter's: Our eventual harvest is a season-long process of course, starting with proper pruning of trees in late February. From there, it takes constant vigilance and precise timing throughout the season to fend off problems like frost, insects and disease. Harvest is still best done by hand (which surprises many of our customers), and aside from a machine that washes apples and sorts them by size, we also grade by hand. We are definitely a small company, with only a few of us to do most of the work, including Shane and Elisa - who put in far more hours than the rest of us! Big apple growers wax and store so they can sell for the entire next year. We've found people aren't necessarily aware of the fact that when they eat an apple in the middle of July it was likely grown eight to nine months prior. And while there is certainly nothing "wrong" with that (unless you're allergic to the wax, like our owner), spring and summer is the worst time for getting a true feel for the complex taste of apples. We encourage people to really embrace apples in the fall and early winter.

OCC: Please share challenges/successes of this year's season.

Pinter's: Pretty obvious challenge this year...drought. We have hand-watered all six acres of trees nearly all season long this year. We estimate we've dumped over 35,000 gallons of water this year, and it still is not enough. While we are fortunate to have a very heavy crop on all varieties, many are struggling to finish ripening. We are going through rows multiple times to pick the ripe apples as they finish. This is proving to be very inefficient on a labor end and difficult to provide our customers with an accurate time of when varieties will be available. But we've been told by one of our orchard consultants that we have one of the biggest and best crops of Honeycrisp they've seen this season! It's great to hear that our additional work is paying off.



OCC: Please let us know Pinter's Garden & Pumpkin's current, and future, plans.

Pinter's: We're always evaluating variety performance. We've recently decided to eliminate two varieties that have not done well for us, and are in a multi-year process of re-grafting different varieties onto the rootstock of those we've eliminated. We're dedicating more space to Zestar, which is rapidly becoming more and more popular, and to EverCrisp, considered by many to be a "next big star" when it comes to apples. While our orchards are still young, we are surprised at the amount of customers that don't realize we have apple orchards (or think we are growing grapes!). We're currently spending time getting our social media, website and full online presence updated to reflect our orchards. We will have more and more apples available weekly, and we're excited to announce that we're busy honing in on our own apple cider recipe (fingers crossed that we can debut it this season!) Our pumpkin patch season is quickly approaching. We look forward to greeting guests at its opening Saturday, Oct. 7.

