

DIRTY FINGERNAILS AND ALL

Mindful mentoring, with a twist

BY SIOUX ROGERS

Weird as this may sound, I actually thought I was born a gardener, accounting for my forever-dirty fingernails. I thought that this was some kind of genetic thing, like blue or brown eyes. My uncle on one side of my family and my grandmother from the other side were both excellent gardeners. I assumed my gardening skill and dirty fingernails were genetically inherited. I also, absurdly, assumed it to be easy for everyone. You know the expression: “If I can do it, certainly you or anyone can.” So not true!

So, what the gosh, not everyone is born with gardening DNA. After 54 years of watching me garden, my son did learn one important lesson: when bringing your mother a bouquet of flowers, make sure your wife gets a bigger bouquet. (Actually, I didn't teach him that, but it was a smart move.)

This year, a young friend, Mikey, called with a few gardening questions. This fellow was a non-gardener, but I wondered if he was about to move into a “back-to-the-soil” mode. Yeah, I was right. He wanted to ease into gardening by planting some tomato plants and asked for my help, saying he likes the way I garden. Whoopee, I get to be a gardening mentor!



Gardening mentor coaching and instructing young gardeners (ces.ncsu.edu).

Mentoring means to coach, counsel, guide, and instruct. My approach to mentoring gardeners is offbeat, nonstandard, and not textbook-based. I believe in success, achievement by any means, especially when learned from failure. If all is perfect all the time, how do you learn? You most likely don't; you just take everything for granted.

Mikey, a psychologist who works with people, not plants, was actually doing everything “right”—according to the gardening manual. What he did not realize was that plants, like people, have different needs and don't always function according

to manuals. He did not know he had to look and listen to the plants. For instance, the manual said to water every four days. But the days were overcast, and since his tomatoes were planted on a slightly downhill slope, the tomato plants at the bottom were overwatered. Yes, they drowned—like, dead. After that, I felt that Mikey needed some encouragement, like: “Your other plants are doing great because they're at the top of the slope.” Mikey did realize that this was not

a failure but a lesson.

I brought Mikey over to our vegetable garden, hoping I wouldn't scare him with the massiveness of our space, now that he, too, was gardening. I also doubted if my philosophy of gardening would work for him. Oh, right. I forgot: he had asked me.

First, I explained that this particular vegetable garden, as opposed to edible landscaping in other parts of our gardens, was functional—no garden fairies, funky chairs, or garden sculpture with the veggies. (But come to think of it, why not?) Right now, the vegetables are in raised beds with hog fencing.

“So, Mikey, why did I plant the lettuce on this side of the raspberry vines and the strawberries on the other?” Shoulder shrug.

“I looked and listened to the plants. The lettuce didn't like to live on the sunny side of the raspberries; they wilted and got sunburned. Strawberries luxuriate in the sun. On the other side, they were stretching so high for sun, they looked like miniature trees without strawberries.”

Mikey understood the “look” part, but not exactly the “listen” stuff. “What did you hear? What did the plants say?”

Um, is it some type of sign language? Is it like understanding your child's needs or your animal's needs without verbal clues? Yup, it is. With plants, for example, are the leaves drooping? Maybe your dog droops when overly warm or dehydrated. Are the leaves drooping because they are cold? Does your child or you perhaps get droopy when too cold and want to go under cover? How to observe, feel, and listen to the entire story is certainly not taught in an instruction manual.

There is no such thing as failure, only an opportunity to learn.

Sioux Rogers

littlemuddyred@gmail.com



Sioux Rogers

■ HOLIDAY WINE PAIRING

Continued from page 1

Devitt Winery red blend

Devitt Winery's Aggie Dog Red blend also goes well with pizza, according to winemaker and foodie Brendon Butler. Its easy drinkability keeps it from overpowering most pizzas. Brendon's favorite pizza is margherita with fresh tomato and basil. Another nice pairing is sausage, mushroom, and olive. A spicy sausage works well for those who like a little heat or a nice Italian sausage for that pop of flavor.

Valley View Winery chardonnay and viognier

Pair a glass of Valley View's Domaine Rogue Chardonnay with a spicy-sweet Dijon mustard- and maple syrup-glazed ham. Every bite melts in your mouth, bringing to life a sense of annual traditions, passed down through generations.

Or try Valley View's refreshing viognier with delicious crispy, golden-brown latkes, traditional potato pancakes made with freshly grated potatoes, onions, and eggs, fried to perfection for a crispy crunch on the outside and tender potato on the inside. Pairing latkes with the light tanginess of an Applegate-grown viognier is a wonderful way to celebrate heritage and the warmth of this festive season. Salut!

Touriga Nacional

Transport your taste buds south of the border with, say, traditional holiday tamales (a corn dough filled with meat, cheese, or vegetables) that embody the spirit of celebration in many Latin cultures, or with a juicy citrus-brined turkey stuffed with a savory blend of cornbread, chorizo, roasted poblano peppers, diced apples, and raisins. For an extraordinary pairing with either dish, uncork a bottle of Red Lily Vineyards' 2021 The Song. Winemaker Rachel Martin makes this 2024 gold-medal winner from Portuguese Touriga Nacional grapes grown by Virginia Oaxaca's Pavo Real Vineyards. Its robust character beautifully complements the savory spices of the tamales, creating a festive flavor explosion that will leave your guests wanting mas y mas!



Suzy and Joe Ginet, owners of Plaisance Ranch, where you can find mondeuse wine and prime rib. Photo: Cathy Rodgers.



Cathy Rodgers and her RiverCrest Ranch pinot noir.

Schmidt Family Vineyards offers a similar vinous treat with its 2021 Touriga Nacional Reserve.

Devitt Winery rosé

At Devitt, Brendon likes When Pigs Fly Shiraz rosé with turkey. Pairing with turkey can be tricky as it's easy to overshadow its flavors with many red wines, but white wines don't always offer the best flavor profiles to pair with certain cooking styles. Here, a nice rosé can serve well, especially with a turkey with a bold flavor. Brendon's ideal turkey prep is to spatchcock it, a cutting technique to lay the turkey flat, which helps with even cooking, seasoning it with a mix of Cajun spices, and then smoking it for several hours, making sure not to burn the outside. If possible, while smoking the turkey, place it on top of a roasting pan with celery, carrots, onions, and a small amount of water or stock. This can help keep the turkey moist and provide a lovely side of savory smoked vegetables.

Plaisance Ranch mondeuse

At Plaisance Ranch, owners Suzy and Joe Ginet's favorite pairing is a hearty prime rib—a classic centerpiece for



Devitt Winery's rosé and red blend. Photo: Brendon Butler.

any holiday feast—with Plaisance Ranch's mondeuse, made from a bold red grape from Savoie, France, that can stand up to the rich, marbled cut of beef. The pairing is especially suitable at Plaisance, where Suzy and Joe have continued Joe's grandfather's tradition of cattle-raising and winemaking on the ranch he, Papa Joe, founded when he arrived in the Applegate Valley in 1898. That Papa Joe's father hailed from Savoie doubles the appropriateness of this wine. Mondeuse is like a big spicy pinot, popular for its smooth tannins and rich earthy flavors, making it the perfect partner for this ultimate holiday indulgence. The wine's complexity enhances the flavors of the prime rib with each salivating mouthful, creating a memorable dining experience that your guests will talk about long after the last glass is poured. This pairing exemplifies the warmth of family gatherings. Oh, mon dieu!

Schultz Glory Oaks sparkling tempranillo

Debbie and Greg Schultz have been cultivating fine wines since 2010, employing 11 Baby Doll sheep and six African Boer goats in their sustainable agricultural practice. Land stewardship has been at the core of their winemaking, and what better way to finish off a holiday meal than with their estate-grown 2023 sparkling Tempranillo rosé? Pair this with an almond torte decorated with sliced almonds for a little extra almond-flavor crunch, and you have a great spirited wine with a little slice of heaven.

As you plan your holiday festivities, consider these exquisite pairings from the Applegate Valley. Each wine and each dish tells a story, celebrating cherished culinary traditions and the region's rich winemaking heritage at the same time. Whether you're toasting to new beginnings or reminiscing about years gone by, these pairings will help uncork the holiday spirit and bring friends and family together around the table. Cheers to fine wines, delicious traditions, and the joy of celebrating with loved ones this holiday season!

Cathy Rodgers

cathyrodgers55@gmail.com

Holiday pairing sources

Chardonnay and viognier: Valley View Winery, 1000 Upper Applegate Road, Jacksonville; 800-781-9463; valleyviewwinery.com

Mondeuse and prime rib: Plaisance Ranch, 16955 Water Gap Road, Williams. 541-846-7175; plaisanceranch.com.

Pinot noir: RiverCrest Ranch, 8127 Upper Applegate Road, Jacksonville. 408-838-4392; rivercrestranch.com.

Pizza: Applegate Country Club, 15090 Highway 238, Applegate. 541-846-1666; applegatecountryclub.com.

Red blend and Shiraz rosé: Devitt Winery, 11412 Highway 238, Jacksonville. 541-899-7511; butler7976@gmail.com.

Sparkling rosé: Schultz Glory Oaks, 755 Slagle Creek Road, Grants Pass. greg@schultzwines.com, 541-414-8448; debbie@schultzwines.com, 541-414-8444.

Touriga Nacional grapes: Pavo Real Vineyard, 540 Tumbleweed Trail, Applegate. 340-748-1609; pavorealvineyard.com.

Touriga Nacional wine: Red Lily Vineyards, 11777 Highway 238, Jacksonville. 541-846-6800; redlilyvineyards.com. Schmidt Family Vineyards, 330 Kubli Road, Grants Pass. 541-846-9985; sfvineyards.com.