



featured

PASSION FOR GROWING TURNS

Caleb Carter

How many different apple varieties can you name off the top of your head?

Five or six?

Ten?

Dick Young of Young's Apple Box Orchard can show you over 50, and counting!

Young's Apple Box Orchard, owned by Dick and his wife, Ruth, is just south of Lingle. The orchard



Young's Apple Box Orchard has grown from four trees to almost 300.

began in 2005 with a dream and four apple trees. Following that success, another 20 trees were added and has since grown to almost 300 trees.

Although Dick had his own calling as a pastor, he always had an admiration for those who grew things. After retiring in 2004, he found time to follow a new calling and his passion for growing things, as evidenced by his beautiful yard and garden. He heard stories about picking apples from a small orchard down the road and figured if they could grow apples, then so could he. Dick will admit he enjoys growing trees maybe even more than eating the apples.

Growing an Orchard

One of Young's goals is to identify apple varieties best adapted for planting locally. He has collected cuttings (referred to as scions) from old apple trees across southeast Wyoming with the proven ability to survive Wyoming's harsh climate. These are grafted onto rootstock and planted in his graft nursery for later planting in the orchard. Young also purchases varieties from other parts of the country in his search for those best-adapted for southeast Wyoming.

"I enjoy taking two things and growing them together. Making something that wasn't there. There is a joy and wonder in that," says Young of the grafting process.



The orchard has trees grafted of cuttings from old apple trees dotted across southeast Wyoming.

Two things Young looks for in a suitable apple tree are its cold hardiness and bloom time. USDA zones 3 or 4 are best for southeast Wyoming, as are late bloomers, giving a tree a better chance at avoiding the late frosts common to the area.

He also enjoys the history behind the various types of apples. A couple of unique varieties he is growing include 'Esopus Spitzenburg,' a hardy variety said to have been a favorite of Thomas Jefferson, and 'Newton Pipin,' another popular colonial variety grown by Jefferson and George Washington.

Wyoming Apple Lore

Some of the varieties he is now growing have come from trees from an old orchard near Lusk at the site of the old Hat Creek Station, a stop

landowner

INTO GRAND EXPERIMENT

for the Deadwood Stage. Most of these trees are in decline, with many lost in the flooding last year. Many of these trees survived for more than half a century with little to no care. Although the varieties are often unknown in these old orchards, one variety was said to be a good pie tree and labeled the "Soldier Pie."

Young has also grafted scions from trees at the orchard down the road as well as an old orchard known historically as the Pope Orchard between Lingle and Fort Laramie. He also enjoys helping others save old apple trees "back on the farm" or "at Grandpa's place."

He has sold his apples at the local farmers market but now relies on regular customers and word-of-mouth. And, true to the name of the orchard, he also sells wooden boxes of varying sizes, which he makes, for customers to take home their bounty. He refers to one box as the "pie box," with just enough apples for two pies: one for the customer and one to bring back!

Learning as He Goes

Through reading, watching videos, and talking to other growers, Young has learned how to plant and care for his orchard, describing it as a big science experiment. He has learned tips and tricks and is always looking for new ideas and methods



The apple orchard is the fruit of retired pastor Dick Young's labors following a new calling and passion for growing things.

to improve production. Young paints the trunks of his trees white to combat sunscald. He uses sticky traps to help detect and control insect pests, including apple maggots and codling moths and has realized chicken wire does not keep voles out of his graft nursery.

He faced his biggest challenge last spring when about 60 trees were lost due to the combined effects of the flash freeze in November 2014 and the late season Mother's Day snowstorm in 2015. Temperatures

that November dropped from 60 degrees Fahrenheit to 15 below in 48 hours. In May, the temperature dropped to the mid-20s overnight, with about 10 inches of snow. Most of the trees were budded out by then, so the buds died. The orchard produced less than a bushel of apples last year.

It was a learning experience by natural selection but helped identify hardy varieties. Varieties that still produced some fruit included 'Freedom', 'Enterprise', and



Some of Dick Young's favorite, hardy varieties:

- Freedom
- Cortland
- 20 ounce
- Jonamac
- Honeycrisp
- Snowsweet
- Spartan
- Enterprise
- Wealthy
- Esopus Spitzenburg

Some trees did not survive the combined effects of the deadly November 2014 temperature drop and a Mother's Day snowstorm last year.

'Jonamac'. The varieties '20 ounce', 'Esopus Spitzenburg', 'Wealthy', and 'Cox's Orange Pippin' (or simply "Cox") demonstrated an ability to regrow quickly, though severely damaged. The cold hit the younger trees the hardest, largely due to their more exposed locations in the newer part of the orchard.

Plans for the Future

Young is continuing his search for new varieties, with plans to also graft several of the varieties that survived the harsh weather over the past winter. He is also looking for ways to share his knowledge and efforts with others and plans to hold grafting workshops, orchard tours, and apple tastings, and wants to help people interested in learning more and continuing the legacy by growing their own apple trees.

For more information, contact Young at (307) 837-2879.



Young checks a codling moth insect trap on one of his apple trees.

*Hearing the word "pie" might have stirred **Caleb Carter's** appetite for more information about Dick Young's orchard. Carter is a University of Wyoming Extension educator based in Goshen County and serves southeast Wyoming. He specializes in crop systems and can be reached at (307) 532-2436 or ccarte13@uwyo.edu.*