

HOME & GARDEN

Celebrating the producers and the winners

By PAT LEUCHTMAN
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Meet me at the fair. And almost everyone does meet their family, friends, neighbors, and workmates at the Franklin County Fair as they stroll along the midway to see if they can win a stuffed animal, buy some cotton candy, get up the nerve to go on the Whirlwind, eat a candy apple, buy a chance on a truckload of firewood, eat some corn-on-the-cob or pie a la mode or drink a giant glass of fresh squeezed lemonade. (Obviously my heart is located solidly next to my stomach as I wander along the midway.)

The fair has something for everyone, but the highlight for me is the exhibits in the Roundhouse. Everywhere else the consumer is courted and wooed, but in the Roundhouse the producer is recognized, congratulated and celebrated.

Because of the nature of work in the modern world, many of us no longer have the opportunity to feel the pride that comes when a job is completed and a tangible object has been created. So often we are involved with piece work or paper pushing, and even though we know we are an important part of the process or provide a necessary service, there is something in us that longs to create, to hold something in our hands and say, "I made this."

I think I enjoyed my early years as a "housewife" and felt valuable even though I wasn't bringing money into the family coffers because I was a producer. I sewed clothes for the kids and curtains for the windows and embroidered for the satisfaction of creating something beautiful. I scorned mixes and baked my own bread and put solid meals on the table every night. I found pleasure in the labor and took pride in the finished product.

So it is to the Roundhouse I go to admire production, perfection and abundance. The flower exhibits especially are a joyous clashing of color and form. The humble marigolds rub shoulders with the sophisticated dahlias, but somehow neither suffers by comparison.

The roses come in all shades, yellow, pink and crimson and inspire me to fill a whole garden with roses.

The winners all have something to teach us. Norman and Mary Jane Oates of Leyden won a blue ribbon for their asters, which were an unusual and beautiful shade of pinky-red that I had never seen before. Helen Clark of West Deerfield took a first with her ornamental cabbage, which would make a

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striking centerpiece for an autumn feast.

Lest we think that all beauty comes from slaving over the flower border all season, Judy Ciszewski of Greenfield shows us that Queen Anne's Lace, Joe Pye Weed and loosestrife can be gathered from along the roadsides and made into a delicate arrangement that definitely deserves first prize.

Naturally I am always interested in the vegetables, and I saw some familiar names among this year's winners. Ken and Patti Spatcher of Leyden won several ribbons, but I was particularly taken with their large, golden orange Delicious squash that took a first.

Every day I drive by Mother Earth Produce on Route 2 in Shelburne and admire the intensive gardens that are so carefully tended. This year Janet Iwanowicz of MEP won several awards including blue ribbons for her yellow squash and tender young peas. She also won a first for her charring bowl display, which is one of my favorite categories.

The high quality of the prize-winning vegetables was especially notable with Babette Phelps' eggplants, the skin smooth and unmarred, the color deep and rich, and the shape small and regular — promising tender, sweet eating.

And of course, it's always fun to see who's winning prizes for the most giant specimens. This year William Siren took a blue ribbon for his enormous pumpkin, and, while I admired it, I was glad it wasn't up to me to get it whole and unblemished from the field and into the Roundhouse. And I thought Tom Corso of Greenfield also deserved a prize for keeping the birds out of his prize-winning giant sunflower seed head.

Before finishing the agricultural exhibits I like to check over the fruit displays. My fruit production has been minimal so far, but I have great hopes and plans. Clarkdale Fruit Farms always win a number of awards and this year a stunning and elaborate display of apples, peaches, pears, plums and grapes won the Henry Cushman Award. Here in the heavy fragrance of the fruit is the evidence of the richness of the land and the skill of the gardener.

There is a time to plant and a time to reap. At Fairtime we see that there has been a time to work, but finally there is a time to boast — at least a little bit.



Recorder/Chuck Blake

Tom Clark of Clarkdale Fruit Farm in Deerfield reaches for a ripe McIntosh apple.

The farm won the Henry Cushman Award at the Franklin County Fair this year for

their display of apples, peaches, pears, plums and grapes.