

He's Raising Rice In Vermont

Rice can be raised successfully in northern states, says farmer and author Ben Falk, who's proving it on his small Vermont farm.

"Our soil is very poor and can't be tilled due to boulders and heavy clay," explains Falk. "Rice is a staple we can grow here using paddies."

Falk carved 5 paddies out of a hillside, located downstream from a larger retention pond. "You don't need a wet area to grow rice; you just need to be able to get water to it," explains Falk. "We flood our paddies every few weeks when the rice is putting on the most growth."

It can be easier to make a paddy in dry soil that holds water than in muck land, he says, and easier to control the water levels. The 12-in. berms allow water levels as high as 8 in. for weed control, though the water level is normally kept at 1 to 4 in. deep.

"Rice likes to be flooded, and it's a good weed control strategy," explains Falk. "However, flooding isn't required. We are experimenting with growing rice in minimal standing water."

Falk started with seed rice from the USDA Germ Plasm Center, enough to start 20 plants. The variety is grown in the mountains of northern Japan. The first year he grew it in buckets to get seed for the next year's crop. In succeeding years the seeds have been soaked, germinated and planted in flats like vegetable starters, transferred

to a cold frame and then to a paddy.

"Frost free days are our limiting factor," says Falk.

Timing is a matter of getting plants in the ground after the last expected frost with time to mature before frost in the fall. This past year, a late and cold spring slowed the crop too much to mature in the paddies. Even an attempt to transplant rice plants to a greenhouse failed.

"We start our plants in the greenhouse. This adds a month to our growing season, and that is usually enough as the rice needs 120 days to mature," says Falk.

"The amazing thing about paddies is that they rarely lose their accumulated nutrients," he adds. "If they do overflow with heavy rains, the water and nutrients are distributed through a series of swales to trees, bushes and other vegetation down-hill."

Rice hulls are hard to detach from the grain. Falk stumbled across an old dehulling machine that has made a difficult process much easier. He now offers custom dehulling to others in the area trying to grow rice.

"It's a 2-man machine that hulls emmer, wheat and rice, as well as other grains and even oats," says Falk. "We can do 100 lbs. an hour with it, and winnowing the grain from the trash is easy."

Even with the dehuller, Falk doesn't expect rice production to be competitive in areas like Vermont as long as transportation is cheap.



Vermont farmer Ben Falk carved 5 rice paddies out of a hillside, located downstream from a large retention pond. "We flood the paddies every few weeks during the growing season," he says.

For Falk, rice represents a good homestead survival crop.

"I think we should be able to grow the equivalent of 3,500 lbs. per acre," says Falk. "It's nice to have several hundred pounds of rice for human and animal feed."

In his book, *The Resilient Farm And Homestead*, Falk outlines a number of ways to create a food, energy and water secure homestead. His company works with clients

to develop self-sustaining, resilient and regenerative farmsteads, food systems and other projects. He offers tours, workshops and special events at the farm. Falk asks that people contact the farm in advance to arrange visits.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Whole Systems Design, LLC (ph 802 343-9490; design@wholesystemsdesign.com; www.wholesystemsdesign.com).

Flower Business Blooms On Illinois Farm

An entrepreneurial spirit that started in 4-H and FFA has bloomed in a special way for Mariah and Greg Anderson. "We knew we wanted to operate some kind of ag-related business, and then the mum enterprise came along and gave us our start," says Greg.

The Andersons have been operating Mariah's Mums & More on their farm near Clinton, Ill., since 2009. They grew 300 mums from cuttings the first year and are aiming at 6,000 plants for 2014. About 60 percent of the mums are marketed to area retailers, 20 percent are sold at community events, and 20 percent are sold to customers who visit the farm.

The Andersons are diversifying the business in 2014 by adding annual flower and vegetable bedding plants that they'll start from seed, creating hanging baskets of flowers. They're also launching a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operation that will produce and deliver baskets of fresh weekly produce for investors. Two high-tunnel greenhouses that are 20 ft. by 100 ft. and 20 ft. by 200 ft. were recently purchased to propagate bedding plants and grow early and late-season vegetables. "We figure the greenhouses will help us to extend the growing season by giving us 9 to 10 months of frost-free production," Greg says.

When they started their business, Mariah and Greg both had full-time jobs. Greg worked in research for a seed company and Mariah worked for Farm Bureau as a special-service coordinator. As the plant business has grown, Greg has transitioned to full-time with Mariah's Mums & More and the umbrella business, which the couple calls Triple M Farms.

Greg is a strong believer in using technology as a substitute for labor. All mums are grown outside in containers placed on black fabric. "We water all our mums three times a day with an automatic drip-irrigation system," says Greg. "That



Mariah and Greg Anderson grow mums on their Illinois farm, selling the flowers at community events and to customers who visit the farm.



All mums are grown outside in containers placed on black fabric.

saves countless hours compared to watering them manually."

The company's website and Facebook site both play important roles in building the business. Greg says, "Mariah is a tremendous marketer, and Facebook has enabled us to talk about special events and plant promotions, and to interact with customers and prospective customers. It's really handy, for example, to be able to let people know through Facebook which area retailers have inventories of Mariah's mums."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Mariah Dale Anderson, Mariah's Mums & More, Clinton, Ill. (ph 217 898-0706; www.mariahmums.com).



Porcelain farm signs fade at a much slower rate than other sign materials, says Standard Signs of Macedonia, Ohio.

"Made To Last" Porcelain Farm Signs

Standard Signs has been making long-lasting porcelain signs since 1936. The labor-intensive method of firing in a 1,470-degree furnace hasn't changed much in all that time.

"We bake the liquid enamel so it becomes an integral part of the steel," says Dave Zimmerman, who works in sales and customer service for the Macedonia, Ohio, company.

Customers choose porcelain signs because of their colorfastness (they fade at a much slower rate than other sign materials) and their durability, Zimmerman says. Because of the setup/labor required, the company usually makes hundreds or even thousands of the same sign. Typical customers are metal building and pole building manufacturers who order peak signs to place on their buildings for long-term advertising.

"They can have a longevity of 40 to 50 years," Zimmerman says. "Customers often come to us after trying other signs made of plastic or baked enamel or aluminum that didn't last. Porcelain lasts much longer."

Frustration with metal signs that only looked good for a few years led members of the Texas Longhorn Breeders Association of America to Standard Signs, says Cynthia Guerra, administrative assistant for TLBAA. They liked the Standard Signs pricing—\$20 each for 125 18-gauge steel, 19 by 10-in. signs. With brass grommet holes in each corner, members mount them on fences or posts with hooks or wires.

"We're selling them like crazy for \$30 apiece. Some members are buying two or three signs. They're twice as heavy as our old metal signs and more durable. They're so nice," Guerra says, noting that Standard Signs printed them with the font style the association wanted to create a rustic look.

Standard Signs often works with groups or associations. One ranch owner ordered rectangular signs to post around the perimeter of his land, for example.

The cost for just one sign is more than most people want to spend—a minimum of \$400 for a two-color sign. But the cost for multiple orders is very reasonable. Orders for 100 or more 14-in. wide by 4 3/4-in. tall peak signs with two colors runs from \$8 to \$12/sign plus film and freight expenses.

The customer must provide the artwork, and costs are determined by the number of colors, size (up to 36 by 30-in. for peak signs) and design.

The signs are usually made on 20-ga. steel and have drilled holes for mounting.

"We can make circular signs too, up to 24 in. in dia.," Zimmerman adds.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Standard Signs, Inc., 9115 Freeway Dr., Macedonia, Ohio 44056 (ph 800 258-1997, ext. 202; dave@standardsigns.com; www.signsporcelain.com).