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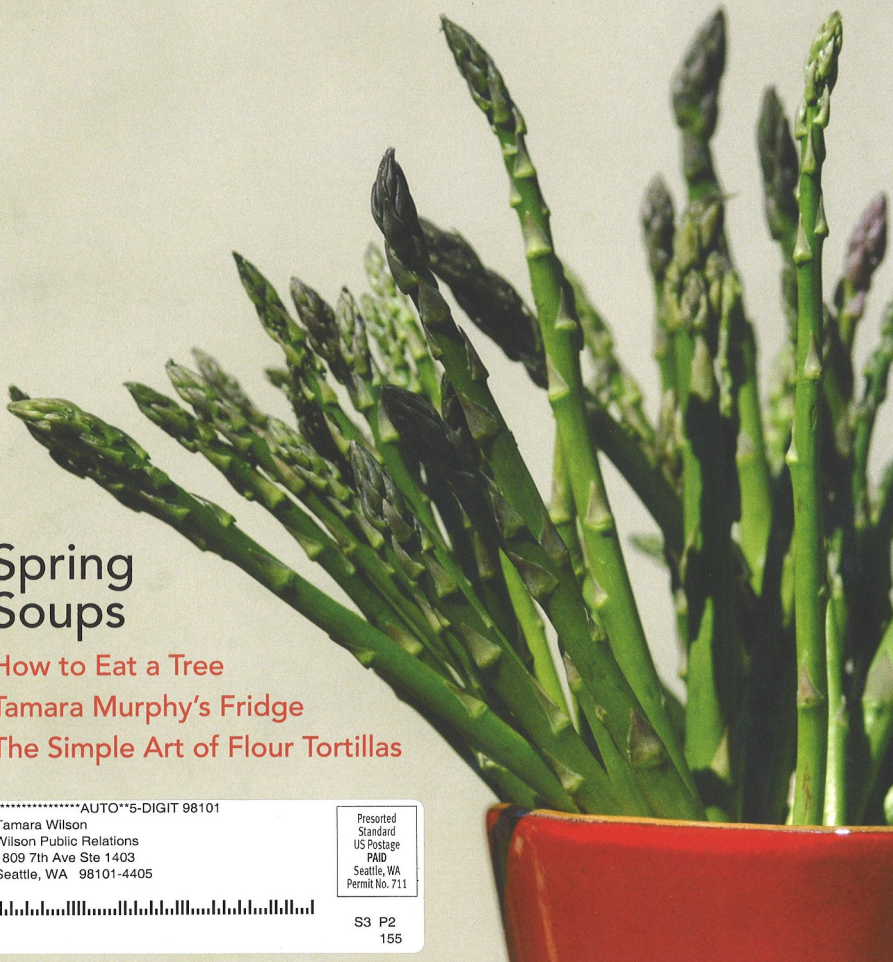
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LATTIN LOVER

BY ANNA ROTH
PHOTO BY JILL LIGHTNER

You will want to be at Lattin's Cider Mill when the apocalypse comes, and not just because of the amazing apple cider donuts. The mother-daughter trio that runs the joint knows a thing or two about survival.

To visit their honey compound in Olympia—equal parts apple cider mill, working farm, peering, cozy, commercial bakery and vegetable garden—is to step back in time to an era when “pickle” was a verb and women had an encyclopedic knowledge of everything from raising livestock to rolling out a perfect pie crust.

Exhibit A: Carolyn Lattin, 76, the farm's world-wise matriarch who's seen it all, who presides over her cider mill with sharp eyes and an established sense of humor. She bought the property with her late husband, Vic Lattin, in 1976. The farm started with 32 acres—these days, it's down to about 25 as suburban sprawl encroaches on what used to be farmland.

Today, her two daughters, Debbie and Sherris, cheerfully help her run the place (“my two boys escaped,” she laughs). Sherris, who has an MBA, takes care of the nuts-n-bolts paperwork, while Debbie does the bulk of the baking. They live in a little log cabin on an edge of the property, which was built from trees from the land. It's a bit frightening—in a good way—to see their efficiency up close. The women of the Lattin family are a finely-tuned machine.

Which takes us to Exhibit B: A paragon of family entrepreneurship, the farm's namesake cider is sold at more than 250 restaurants and grocery stores around Puget Sound.

The origins of the cider were purely accidental. When Carolyn and Vic bought their property, they intended to use it as a chicken farm, but the venture didn't work out economically. Around the same time, the family bought a hand-crank cider mill to use the fruit from the apple trees on their property.

The resulting cider was so delicious that neighbors of theirs requested the cider to be served at a restaurant they were opening. Carolyn and Vic were also contacted by the Olympia Food Co-Op and started commercial operations. Lattin's Cider became a staple for the citizens of Olympia, and spread throughout the state.

The cider is made from a combination of 12 apple varieties that the Lattins import from a farm in Eastern Washington by the truckload. They've dealt with the same Yakima growers for more than 30 years, and have had the same delivery boy for much of the time (Carolyn remembers the day he was given his semi truck on his 16th birthday).

Imporing apples may seem like the less eco-friendly option, but it's not for lack of trying. Once upon a time, the Lattins had 36 producing

apple trees on the property, but “couldn't afford to pick 'em,” says Carolyn, explaining that the local kids they employed had to be trained to pick apples without bruising them. It wasn't worth the man hours. The Lattins decided to leave the growing and harvesting to the experts, and focus on what they do best: Making delicious things out of fruit.

To dismiss Lattin's as merely a cider mill is to miss the entire point; these ladies know their way around a Government. Their range of products is reminiscent of the Buddha Geary speech in *Fewer Gearys*: anything you could possibly make out of apples, Lattin's has it.

Along with the delicious original cider (“it tastes just like eating an apple, except you don't have to chew,” says Carolyn), there are five more flavors, including blackberry and cherry. The ladies also churn out a couple dozen varieties of pie, apple butter, tons of freezer jams and fruit sauces, hand-made caramels, dried fruit, spiced peaches and pears, pickles in every color of the rainbow, apple sauce, apple butter, apple turnovers, quick breads, and incredible apple cider donuts. (Homemade apple fritters are available only on Saturdays, and worth both the trip and the 10 minute wait between batches.)

“We're working on our third generation of customers.”

Despite profit margins that are getting lower by the year (the high cost of shipping and the rise in the price of apples is driving the family farm out of business, an old adage), Carolyn Lattin is also determined to give back to the community in any way possible.

She was instrumental in starting both the Olympia Farmer's Market and the Precious District Farmer's Market in Tacoma about fifteen years ago (“It takes a real commitment to stand there and build something,” she says). During the fall the farm has hay rides, a corn maze and more harvest-themed fun, and in Easter, they put out 40,000 eggs filled with \$3,000 worth of chocolate and candy for local kids. Volunteers come in for weeks in advance to fill these eggs.

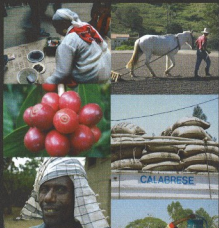
“We're working on our third generation of customers—the grandkids and their families,” Carolyn says with a smile.

The interior of the Lattin's small operation is homopus, housed in the same old barn building as the cider mill itself. There are homemade cushions and a string, cone mesh of childrens hanging around the cider mill. Along with the shelves of apple products, the Lattins also sell fruit from Eastern Washington farms along with vegetables from their own garden.



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Outside on the grounds, handmade signs point to the petting zoo and the vegetable garden. The Lattins keep bunnies, goats, fowl, and Muscovy ducklings, and sell bags of feed in the mill for kids to use. (Just don't get too attached to the animals: They're all for sale. You know, for meat. It's the reality of farm life.)

They even feed their cattle with the apple pulp. "We load it on our flatbed truck and they come running, so we don't waste it after the juice is taken out," explains Debbie.

Then there's the garden, er, gardens, three of them to be exact, all heavy with vegetables for the farm. A quick visual survey of one of them spots lettuce, Swiss chard, rhubarb, spinach and radishes, but there's more where that came from. "Anything we can grow, we do grow," says Carolyn. "We have almost every vegetable you can name."

Very few people have the range of talent that the Lattin women possess, but they are surprisingly modest about their superwoman-like litany of skills. "We just do a lot of things here, we're real diversified—it's helped us survive over the years," Debbie says, and shrugs. "All of us work too hard." *eS*

Eating and drinking things are all in a day's work for Anna Roth, a freelance writer and editor. Find out more at her website, www.anna-roth.com.



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Lattin's annual Easter egg hunt happens Saturday, April 11. Apple fritters and fresh-made donuts are available on Saturdays. Call ahead to arrange school field trips or group tours of this working farm.

Drink the Cider

Lattin's ciders use no preservatives or added sugars. It's available at 250 locations around Puget Sound, under the Country Cider Mill label.

Fresh Juice Works

Metropolitan Market (all locations)

Olympia Food Co-op

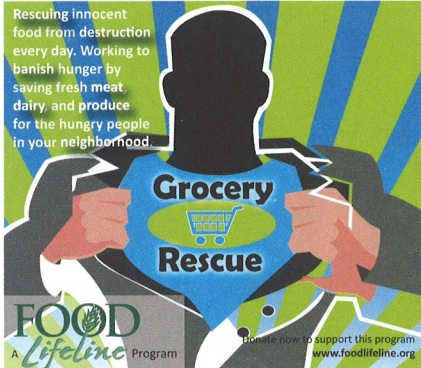
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