



Goldendale Garden Supply owners Brad Johnston and Heather Lipko with their furry mascot, Wombat.

## Propagating a Gardening Community

*Couple creates a source for local gardeners to find what they need*

By Jeanie Senior

Heather Lipko and Brad Johnston opened Goldendale Garden Supply last April, a few years after they bought a place off Woodland Road—and well after they got tired of driving to The Dalles or Hood River for gardening needs.

In a town surrounded by agriculture and filled with enthusiastic gardeners, Heather says it did not seem right not to have a garden store. Goldendale Garden Supply “is not only for ourselves, but the entire community,” she says.

Located on S. Columbus next door to Carquest, the store sells organic gardening supplies as well as heritage and non-genetically modified seeds.

Again available this spring are vegetable starts from heirloom seeds.

When the store opened last year, Heather and Brad knew they were going to sell seeds. But the success of the starts came as a surprise.

“We didn’t realize we were going to sell starts until it happened,” Heather says. “We had so many people come in and ask for them, it seemed silly to say no.”

The starts flew off the shelves before Heather and Brad could refill them.

“We are getting ready for it this year,” Heather says. “We built a second greenhouse at our farm for the store. My goal is 3,000 starts, which should be a cakewalk.”

Heather and Brad are happy to source items for customers. They have shelves of reference books for consultations.

On Goldendale Garden Supply’s Facebook page, Heather posts shop updates, community news, and links to articles about various gardening and food subjects.

The shop sells mesh hanging food dryers and hydroponics equipment. It also offers greenhouse design and fabrication at a fraction of the cost of ready-made greenhouses.

The store reflects the couple’s personal belief in food sufficiency and eating locally grown food.

“Neither Brad nor I are fans of GMO food,” Heather says. “We like knowing what we are eating.”

The couple offered a workshop in backyard beekeeping in February and hope to have other classes in the future.

In April, they will brew and



sell their organic compost tea, a brew that users credit with rejuvenating dying plants and boosting the growth of gardens. It sells for \$3 a gallon if customers bring their own container. It is \$4 a gallon in a Garden Supply container.

Heather and Brad make a fresh batch each week. Any that is left over goes to the Goldendale Community Garden.

“We try to be as involved as we can with the community garden,” Heather says.

California’s ongoing drought inevitably will mean higher prices for the fruit and vegetables raised there, Brad notes, a solid reason for consumers to grow as much of their own food as possible.

Heather is convinced fate brought them to Klickitat County from Mosier. They were looking at land in Oregon, but it didn’t work out.

“We found the property

here on the Internet in seven days,” Heather says. “We were able to move in two weeks later.”

They have dogs, cats, chickens and pigs at their farm.

“We want to get to the point where we have cattle or bison, with the goal of being food sufficient,” Heather says. “I learned at a young age how to garden and can; it’s kind of a hobby of mine. So it was kind of a no-brainer to buy a nice chunk of land, and incorporate animals and a garden. Ultimately, we do want to have a nursery.”

Brad grew up in Tennessee, and Heather grew up in Pennsylvania. Both learned about gardening from their grandparents.

Brad studied horticulture and nursery maintenance in college. Heather, who calls herself “kind of a physics nerd,” majored in space sciences.

When they were packing to



Above, the store’s extensive seed rack.

Above left, Heather checks the progress of her hydroponic garden.

move to Goldendale, Heather found a plastic tote filled with a number of seeds saved by Brad’s grandmother, who bequeathed them to Brad because of his studies.

At their new farm, the couple built raised beds for a garden. Heather admits she had reservations because the saved seeds dated to the 1970s, but she gave them a try.

The propagation rate was amazing, she says.

“They have such a low mortality rate, I’m kind of blown away by it, to be honest,” she says. “Now, we’re such fans of heritage seeds.”

Brad and Heather’s Akita puppy, Wombat, is the store mascot. Last year, when their older Akita died, customers who had gotten to know him at the store mourned along with Brad and Heather. They sent cards and brought casseroles.

“I love this place,” Heather says. ■