

A Very Berry Vacation

PENNINGTON FARMS

Ann and Jerry Atnip's day started with a leisurely drive from their Ashland home through historic Jacksonville and into the Applegate Valley. They stopped for a picnic lunch and a bottle of Sauvignon Blanc along the way. From there, it was just another 15 minutes to their destination for the night: Pennington Farms.

This 90-acre berry farm with its vintage barn-turned-bakery produces some of Southern Oregon's most quintessential edibles, all made by hand and available at regional growers markets: jams bursting with berries, berry syrups, berry scones, berry turnovers, berry pies, cookies and other baked goods.

Certainly the Atnips planned to sample some of these goodies, yet they were also heading to Pennington Farms for a hands-on experience. Agritourism, as it's called, has opened for business in the Applegate Valley.

"We have loved taking this alternative life and have found that others are interested in really seeing what goes on day to day," says Cathy, who moved from Colorado to the former hay farm with her husband, Sam, and their children in 1991. "And we do love to share our lives. Thus came the idea of using the guest house for that purpose."

While some visitors rent the house—a three-bedroom, one-bath, 1970s ranch-style home that's been cleverly decorated using only repurposed items salvaged from the farm—as affordable lodging during a stay in Southern Oregon, others want more of the farm experience. That's where agritourism and the related FarmStay concept come in. Inspired by trips through Europe where they'd end up staying with a family in whatever village they landed in for the night, the Penningtons opened their guesthouse to people who wish to "join in or watch what we may be doing."

Upon their arrival, the Atnips were invited to unpack, enjoy some complimentary baked goods and relax on the vista-wrapped back patio before manning their FarmStay stations. Refreshed and outfitted in knee-high rubber Wellingtons, Jerry followed Sam out to the loganberry fields to learn about crop rotation.

"It should be a bumper crop this year with all the rain followed by hot sun," says Sam, looking the farmer in boots, T-shirt, jeans and a big, sun-dappled smile. The loganberries—an heirloom blackberry-raspberry hybrid from the 1880s—grow in groups of seven, explains Sam, with

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FAMILY AFFAIR: Jackie Pennington (left) and her mother, Cathy, tempt customers with homemade baked goods, jams and other treats at Pennington Farms in the Applegate Valley.





FARMSTAY FEATURES: A vintage barn (above) is now the Pennington Farms bakery and retail shop. Sam Pennington (below right) explains crop rotation to FarmStay guests Jerry Atnip (left) and Terry Moore (center).





HELPING HAND: Ann Atnip (left) gets a lesson from Cathy Pennington in weaving the perfect lattice pie crust.



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the first being the biggest. They join over 10 other species on the farm, including the uncommon Scottish tayberry.

Jerry and Sam proceed to compare notes about berry farming, with Jerry sharing stories from his grandfather's berry and dairy outfit in Purdy, Missouri.

Back at the bakery, where Cathy and her daughter, Jackie, make over 1,000 turnovers a week, Ann has donned an apron and is stirring a great bowl of boysenberries. As part of her "Bake-cation," Ann is taking Piemaking 101, a class for small groups that imparts the secrets behind the famously golden, buttery, Pennington Farms pie.

"There is this huge bowl of berries with two big scoops of sugar, one of flour and that's it," says Ann, whose hands have turned purple. "Then you stir, stir, stir so every berry gets coated. Then scoop it out with your hands—Cathy says that's the best way."

This pie receives a lattice top. Ann gingerly laces the strips of soft, pliable, silky crust over the berries. Next comes the Pennington Farms "secret"—an egg wash that gets brushed over the crust.

"You have to beat it till it's really frothy to give the crust that special sheen," discloses Ann. "After you've brushed the crust, you rub your hands in the leftover egg, dip your hands in sugar and then crumble that sugar mixture over the top. It really does make a beautiful crust."

Cathy also plans to offer Jam Making 101 and "The Perfect Chocolate Chip Cookie" classes this fall. Each Bake-cation class is an add-on to lodging costs and can be customized to guests' requests.

Because of the seasonal nature of a berry farm and the Pennington's demanding baking schedule, Cathy advises FarmStay and Bake-cation guests to inquire beforehand as to what may be expected during their travel dates.

If they are coming for specific farm/baking activities, we can try to steer them for dates that coincide with what they may be interested in, says Cathy. If they just want the general farm life, they may experience as much or as little as interest or time dictates.

From berries To Bake-cations, Pennington Farms is always growing something very special. As Cathy likes to say as she brushes some flour off her cheek: "Tag along in the fields, hang out at the bakery, see our world." ★