

Haddam Garden Club

August 2018 Garden Blog Article

by Cindy Tillson



A Splendid Vineyard Afternoon

The RubyBelle Vineyard on Spencer Road in Higganum was the scene of a marvelous late afternoon fund raising affair for the Haddam Garden Club on June 23. RubyBelle is owned by Stew and Rogene Gillmor and is a mighty sophisticated “retirement project” vineyard. They are not just growing a few grapes here.

The Gillmor property is absolutely gorgeous. Besides the beautiful historic buildings, there are the two acres of grapevines, numerous flower gardens, assorted fruit trees, berry bushes and a lovey vegetable garden, too. The remainder of the 35 acres is wooded.

Stew has been tending the grapes and producing wine since 2007 when they first planted. The first harvest was in 2010. There are seven varieties of grapes, both viniferous and American-French Hybrid, which are combined in various ways to produce 350 to 400 bottles of wine per year. All of the wines are named for their granddaughters whose adorable photos grace the labels designed by Rogene.

Stew provided tours to the vineyard explaining the different varieties, their purposes and the afflictions that Mother Nature can dole out. It sounded to me like there is never a dull moment. At this stage, the grape clusters look more like flower clusters but come fall, they will be mature and the excitement begins.

Maurice Adams was stationed in the winemaking area explaining the process. They don’t extract the juice by stomping on the grapes anymore. In fact, it is a very sanitary operation—and quite fascinating.

Laura Grimmer, owner of the Perfect Pear in Chester and resident of Haddam gave our feature presentation. She chose three different wines to demonstrate the effect wine has on the taste of food and vice versa. She explained how to swirl and sniff, the importance of sloshing it around in all corners of your mouth, *then* tasting; *then* tasting again after a bite of the food. I was fascinated at the effect food had on the wine. We did not come away wine snobs, just more knowledgeable about the complementary properties of food and wine, and perhaps a bit tipsy.

The garden club provided plenty of luscious hors d’oerves as well as yummy chocolate desserts to accompany the wine. Marge Supple had very tastefully put together many baskets and items for the raffle and silent auction. The table arrangements that Gail Christie and Barb Stellenwerf made were absolutely stunning making use of garlic scapes, fruit and vegetables besides beautiful flowers. The event was co-chaired by Elizabeth Adams and Deb Karpf but ALL members of the club contributed and worked very hard to make the event a success.

The money the club raises maintain seven gardens in the community and helps with materials that the club uses to make arrangements for town buildings during the winter holidays. We also award an annual scholarship (or in this years case, two) for high school seniors who will be attending college for agricultural, landscape and/or environmental issues in the fall and host educational programs that the community is encouraged to attend.

All in all it was a lovely (fortunately dry) time on a weekend with threatened precipitation. You may wonder where you can purchase RubyBelle wines. Actually, you can't. They share and donate to many local causes so look for their wines while supporting local charities. The club so appreciates all Stew and Rogene donated to this event!