

About Chestnut Brae Farm

Chestnut Brae Farm is an organic 70 acre farm with around 15-20 acres of orchards including 1000 sweet chestnut trees, 16 pecan trees, 2 mulberry trees and 3 walnut trees. There are also 2 fig trees and an assortment of stone fruit and citrus trees. The chestnut trees were planted in the early 1980's by John McBain and Tony Woods, so they are now very mature trees.

We farm using regenerative agriculture which means we have a focus on building the soil health and increasing microbial activity in the soil.

We run sheep on the farm to keep the chestnut suckers under control, the grass down and for meat. We have 2 alpacas to protect the sheep from foxes and other predators especially during lambing season. We have two Angora goats for entertainment and for the mohair wool the produce. The sheep and poultry are fed on the peelings from sweet chestnuts as well as the grass they eat. The chestnuts impart the most delicious flavour to the meat of the animals and is similar to Wagyu Beef in the result with the meat being highly prized by chefs and restaurants for the amazing flavour the chestnut diet gives to the meat.

We pasture raise heritage pigs on the farm. The pigs are fed a diet of fresh pasture grass, pig mix and sweet chestnuts. The best prosciutto in the world comes from Parma in Italy where they raise the pigs on a diet of whey from the Parmigiana factory and sweet chestnuts. The best ham in the world comes from Spain (Jamon Iberico) where they feed the pigs acorns and chestnuts. So in 2015 we followed the Italian and Spanish style of raising the pigs and reared our first litter to 200kgs. The norm in Australia for pigs is to rear them to around 75 kgs. So our pig meat flavour was quite different. Chefs told us that the resultant pork was the best tasting pork they had ever eaten. That pork was certainly the most amazing flavoured pork and bacon that we had ever eaten.

Since then we don't take the pigs so large as it was actually too large for abattoirs to cope with. The pigs are now reared to around 60kgs to fit Australian abattoir requirements which will not take pigs above 100kg in weight. Most of the pigs are still sold to top restaurants and we keep a supply of the pork to provide to our general public customers who love the chestnut fed pork flavour too.

Autumn is harvest season. Sweet Chestnuts are deciduous and the leaves in Autumn turn orange. Chestnut harvest normally begins in March with the chestnuts falling to the ground so it is easy to pick them up. Harvest season normally goes through to the beginning of June. We say 'normally'

because climate change is affecting the chestnuts and each season varies from when it starts to when it finishes.

We encourage people to come and pick their own (PYO) chestnuts. We make chestnut products, such as flour, meal, chutneys, mustard, sauces, icecream, puree and we peel the chestnuts to vacuum pack them. Some peeled chestnuts are sold raw vac packed, others are roasted before vacuum packing. We take our produce to farmers markets and events for sale. During autumn and winter we roast chestnuts at markets and sell hot roasted chestnuts in cones for people to eat hot and fresh.

We attend farmers markets in season. In 2020 season we attend Margaret River Farmers Market – check our website and Facebook page to find out which market we will be attending on any particular weekend.

In a normal year, provided nothing comes up to prevent us - we attend Balingup Small Farm Field Day, Truffle Kerfuffle, Balingup Medieval Festival, Harvey Agricultural Show, Dowerin Field Day and Perth Royal Show – again check our website and Facebook page to see if we have made it along to a particular show.

Chestnut Brae is part of Taste Blackwood, a group of passionate producers from the Blackwood River Valley Region. Taste Blackwood producers collaborate to promote each other's products and assist each other with marketing, deliveries and general collaboration. Taste Blackwood comprises Chestnut Brae, Southern Forest Honey, The Cidery, Organic Fine Food Co., Spring Valley Orchard, Southampton Homestead, Blackwood Valley Beef.

In **Winter** we are very busy peeling chestnuts, making products from the peeled chestnuts, selling the chestnut products to retail outlets whose focus is on handmade, local and boutique products and attending farmers markets to sell our produce. Winter we open our garden to the public as part of the Nannup Flower and Garden Festival in August. The garden was planted around 2006 by a previous owner whose passion was heritage roses and salvia. We are told that at that time, Chestnut Brae's garden held one of the most extensive salvia collections in the State. John and Linda Stanley, being passionate gardeners have replanted many of the salvia which had been lost, and continue to develop the garden.

The orchards are beautiful in every season. In winter the trees lose their leaves, the bare trees are almost pinkish grey in the misty haze of winter, with rust coloured leaves carpeting the ground, the orchard is totally stunning.

In **Spring**, the new leaves form as the trees burst into life again. We commence mulching and mowing the orchard in Spring. We continue to do some pruning where it is needed. We lay the suckers and prunings in between the trees and run the mulcher on the tractor over the thin branches to chop them up and turn them into compost. As we farm organically we do not add any artificial fertilisers nor do we use any chemical sprays of any kind on the farm.

Spring is also lambing season. We have now built our flock to the point where we can cull excess young rams and be able to sell chestnut fed Wiltshire lamb to restaurants. We tasted chestnut fed Wiltshire lamb and it was the most heavenly lamb that we had ever tasted. We supply a small number of top restaurants with our chestnut fed lamb and our own eager customers.

Our poultry are not pets, although we have grown very fond of them all. Our poultry are raised for egg production and for meat for the family. It is hard not to grow attached to animals, but this is a farm, and animals are raised either for the table or to do a job – such as guarding the other animals.

In **Summer**, apart from attending Christmas markets with vacuum packed peeled chestnuts for Christmas menus, chestnut puree, chestnuts in Syrup, chestnut icecream, we take a well needed rest and focus on the rose garden and entertaining family and friends at the farm. We do ask that you don't go walking in long grass in summer and suggest you keep to the areas we have mowed for recreation purposes. Star gazing at the night sky is a must do in summer – try it, see how many satellites you can count.

If you do choose to go for a walk in the chestnut orchard, we ask that you spray the soles of your shoes with the spray provided, and any wheels (pram or other) that you might take with you into the orchard. The spray is Methylated Spirits and water and it is to prevent the transfer of any soil born pathogens into our orchards. The chestnut trees are particularly susceptible to Dieback Disease (*Phytophthora cinaamomi*).