

Building a Nursery Business

Lyle Ditmar was the speaker this week. He began his law practice in 1997. He also wanted to start an orchard in 1992-1993 and bought 70 acres knowing little about the business. They planted 300 trees in 1994, planting them with a Ford 8N tractor and a post hole digger.

The next year they planted another 500 trees and, after skipping a year, planted another 500 trees. They now own 170 acres, three tractors, four wagons, and plant a corn maze and a three acre pumpkin patch. This year Ditmar's Orchard will have 4000 trees and plant 1000 tomatoes.

A lot of the sales at Ditmar's Orchard are pick-your-own. Everyone gets a tractor/wagon ride and a lot of people make it a family affair. There is something different every time you come.

Ditmar's has 25 varieties of apples, 5 varieties of cherries, and 300 peach trees. HyVee will feature their apples in 13 stores this year. Unfortunately, due to a hard frost this winter, the peach tree blossoms were killed for this year.

They produce apple cider on-site. Cider is pure apples, unlike apple juice which is made from reconstituted juice with water and sugar added. They have a machine that uses ultraviolet light to kill bacteria. They made 10,000 gallons of cider last year and are prepared to make 30,000 gallons this year.

Information about Ditmar's Orchard can be found at www.ditmarsorchard.com.