



● Rohan, Deanne, and Matilda, 6, with their dog Scruffy, collect chestnuts in their Wandiligong chestnut grove. Pictures: MATTHEW SMITHWICK



● Harry, 8, and Matilda Whelan, 6, hold bouche de Betizac chestnuts which weigh up to 60 grams.



● Hundreds of red toadstools grow in the chestnut grove belonging to the Whelan family in Wandiligong.

It's easy to fall for this bumper chestnut crop

REPORTS

ELIZA ADAMTHWAITE



WINTER rain followed by a dry summer proved to be fruitful for the Whelan family, who are in the midst of their chestnut harvest at Wandiligong.

Geelong couple Deanne and Rohan, together with their children Harry, 7, and Matilda, 5, will spend about five weeks at their property, Growlers Creek Grove, harvesting their produce.

Their season started on March 20 and they expect to be flat out until early May.

"We don't water our trees so the harvest is really dependent on the season," Mrs Whelan said.

"We had great winter rain but not much in spring.

"Winter rain is a good foundation for them and the storms in the past few weeks have filled the nuts out nicely so the crop is looking really good.

"You never really know until they start falling — a lot of husks can be empty and the nuts won't have formed."

Mrs Whelan said the season is also dependent on a good seed or nut set, which happens

in December during pollination and can be interrupted by rain.

"We don't seem to have had that trouble at all this year and our de coppi crop is looking brilliant," she said.

Their varieties of red Spanish, bouche de Betizac, the sweet de coppi marone and purton's pride — great for boiling and making chestnut puree — are falling now.

They gather and grade the nuts themselves, packing them for fruit and vegetable shops, restaurants, markets and to sell online through their website, growerscreek-grove.com.au

"We're certified organic, which doesn't offer a huge margin but a shop or restaurant will

say they want our chestnuts because we're organic," Mrs Whelan said.

"If we can sell direct we'll get a better price, rather than sending them to market."

They also sell quite a few of their nuts to Brian and Jane Casey, of Australian Gourmet Chestnuts at Eurobin, who look for growers who handle nuts well and get them off the ground quickly.

"Because we're small and do it all ourselves we're attuned to quality and I'm pretty fussy on the grader," Mrs Whelan said.

"We want to make money out of it but it's not our only source of income so we can afford to be fussy and keep our quality there."

Mrs Whelan said harvest was her favourite time of the year, gathering their chestnuts from under the trees and enjoying autumn.

"I love it but some of our friends just shake their heads," she said.

"It's a bit of an obsession. It's that inner forager."

"People think it's cold here and, yes, it does get cold in winter but on a clear, sunny day it's just gorgeous."

Charne fabric in fashion at awards event

BY MICK MCGLONE

THE Charmac Merino stud at Table Top only began two and a half years ago but it has already forged ties with Walcha, Deniliquin, Armidale — and London.

And it's all thanks to the fibre manufactured out of the sheep's wool, the locally made wool Charne fabric.

Stud principal Leon Martin recently attended the Australian Wool Fashion Awards at Armidale where the fabric made a favourable impression.

"The Charmac Merinos supported two entrants in the awards with our fabric, both of who won their sections," he said.

"Nichola Elliot, a year 12 student from Walcha NSW won section 2 — Young Designer Award and Jane Frazer of Deniliquin won section 9 — Evening Wear."

"Jane worked for a while with a designer in London who was one of Diana, Princess of Wales", favourite designers.

"Jane approached us because of some

of the publicity we had and asked us if we were interested in her designing an outfit."

Mr Martin said it was a glamorous event with many high-profile celebrities and designers in attendance.

"From our point of view the awards were an opportunity to profile fabric from non-mulesed sheep, or what is known as ethically produced fibre" he said.

"We only started designing the fabric about 12 months ago and there was a lot of favourable comments about it."

"The professional design of the weave, manufactured by Macquarie Textiles in Albury, has left people gob-smacked, because it is so soft and light and breathes beautifully on the skin, which women love."

"It was a fabulous event, and demonstrated the skill of Australian and New Zealand designers and the diversity and merits of wool in fashion."

"It has certainly opened up some international opportunities for us."



● Leon Martin with award winners at the 2013 Australian Wool Fashion Awards, Jane Frazer and Nichola Elliot.

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