

Matt Family Orchard provides berry-picking fun for adults and kids

By Jennifer Bell | Posted: Friday, June 22, 2012 7:15 am

Rick Matt has always had a knack for gardening,

In fact he once had a large garden of his own, but it produced too much food for his family to handle at their Cypress home.

But when he retired from corporate America 17 years ago, he bought a property on Bauer Hockley Road, and found a way to fulfill his dreams of being a “lazy gardener”--open an orchard.

The Matt Family Orchard began with fruits of Asian origin, like Asian persimmons, pears, and jujubes (similar to a date), Matt said, and has continued growing since.

“We eventually added blackberries, figs, blueberries ... a few citrus fruits, Pakistani mulberries, peaches, pomegranates,” Matt said. “Every year we add a little more.”

At the 40-acre orchard, which is seven miles west of Tomball off FM 2920, Matt said they currently have blackberries to pick until the end of the month, and around the end of June or early July, they’ll have figs aplenty.

Patrons are free to pick whatever they can find, Matt said, and they often don’t think it’s that simple.

“People ask all the time, ‘What should I bring?’” Matt said. “All you really have to bring is your fingers.”

All you can pick

The orchard provides small buckets with wrap inside to carry any fruits, Matt said, and pickers simply pay for the berries they pick before they leave. Right now, berries run about \$3.75/lb., a price that Matt said beats grocery stores and other competitors.

“I can’t charge people for what they eat while they’re out there, though,” Matt said, laughing.

Bowhunting is also allowed outside the property, Matt said, and animals can usually be seen from the inside of the orchard. Matt gives orchard tours, hayrides for kids and adults, and hosts birthday



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Claire Langston, 2, and her mother Sarah, of Tomball, pick blackberries from Matt Family Orchard to take home.

parties and reunions, he said, but some people come just for fun during the week.

Due to the heat, the orchard's hours are 7 a.m. to 1 p.m., Matt said, and regulars come early in the morning.

"Sometimes I'll come in to seven or eight cars waiting for me," Matt said. "People know that's a good time to pick ... people usually don't come alone, they bring their friends, or their kids; it's a social thing."

Sweet deal

The Matt Family Orchard also has 80 hives of bees and sells local raw honey made from them, Matt said, and a nursery where they sell the plants, seeds, and preserves made from the orchard's fruit.

Matt's favorite part of the job is being able to do what he loves, for himself.

"The biggest thing is being my own boss, and I love the people I get to meet," Matt said. "This is good for fresh fruit, fresh air, and exercise; all that and people are just getting something good to eat."

Kim Marshall and Melody Williams, of The Learning Center in Katy, said they brought their daycare group to the orchard for exactly those reasons.

"A lot of kids don't get to see nature like this," Williams said. "Despite the heat, it's a lot of fun."