



Free tastings of the Black Bear Farms products are available at the winery.

Wild about the Black Bear

Since 1992, Jerome and Madeleine Rondelez, with their children Jerome, William and Michelle, have owned and operated the beautiful and lush 83-acre Black Bear Farms of Ontario Estate Winery. The area's first winery to produce fruit wines exclusively, Black Bear's selections have taken the winery world by storm.

Located in Essex County on the western edge of Kingsville, which is one of Ontario's southernmost towns and one which sits on the northern shores of Lake Erie, Black Bear Farms specializes in fruit wines made from their very own berries and fruit. The winery was a surprising and delightful addition to the Rondelez' business; the family has been a part of the farming industry for four generations.

Unlike the other wineries in the Essex County region, Black Bear Farms does not create any wines of the grape variety. "We specialize in fruits, and select varieties of less commonly known berries, in addition to strawberries, raspberries and blueberries," explains Michelle. "We also have blackcurrant, two different types of gooseberries, serviceberries (also known as Saskatoon berries), elderberries. Because of our Belgian

background, we also do a lot of pears, plums and peaches."

Black Bear Farms first expanded into the winery business in 2001, when siblings William and Michelle traveled to Cornell University in New York to meet with members of the North American Strawberry Growers Association (NASGA). "It was a bug some of the farmers put in Bill's ear," Michelle explains. "We learned that this was a way for farmers to build up some extra business." Because the farm already had a surplus of fruit supply, it seemed only natural to expand the business into the winery industry.

It turned out William had a natural talent for winemaking, one which was quickly discovered; within five months of selling their fruit wines to the public, William received a gold medal for Papa's Special Reserve (a blend of red and purple raspberries) at the 2009 All Canadian Wine Championships.

The awards have come fast and furious ever since; almost all of the 15 varieties offered at Black Bear Farms have received a gold, silver or bronze award at a number of national and international wine championships. Purple Raspberry won the bronze medal at the 2010 Finger Lakes Inter-

national Wine Competition, as did Black Currant, Red Raspberry, Golden Raspberry, Strawberry and Golden Plum. Mama's Special Delight, a pure blueberry wine that is currently Black Bear Farms' sweetest offering, and Bear's Reserve, made out of black raspberries, were bronze medal recipients as well. Two of Black Bear Farms' selections impressed the judges most of all: Elderberry took home the gold, as did the Red Raspberry and Purple Plum blend. After the 2010 Finger Lakes Competition Black Bear Farms went on to win Double Gold for the Elderberry, Silver for the Golden Plum, and Bronze for the Red Raspberry and Purple Plum at the 2010 All Canadian Wine Championships held in Windsor, Ontario.

While the winery is not yet open to the public for parties and events, Michelle says that's sure to come in the near future. Currently the winery offers free tastings, as well as tours by appointment only.

For more information, contact Black Bear Farms of Ontario Estate Winery at 519-733-6289, or visit them at www.blackbear-farms.ca. They are located at 1137 County Rd 20 W. in Kingsville, Ontario.