

# Let's Go to the Hops

**B**rian Titus, president of Garrison Brewing Company in Halifax, has long dreamed of creating a brew made with 100-percent locally produced ingredients. Last summer, he had a revelation which he hopes will bring him one step closer to realizing that dream. The *a-ha!* moment occurred during a

pitched the idea to the folks at Ross Farm and before long, a plan for the hop yard was in the works.

Hops are the flower cone of the hop plant. And as any beer aficionado will tell you, they're a key ingredient in the brew, giving it both its aroma and bitter flavour. The more hops, the richer the flavour. Craft beers are

perial Pale Ale won the Canadian Beer of the Year award and was a huge hit with consumers but six months after its launch, a global shortage drove the price of hops through the roof, and Garrison, like other microbrewers, was left scrambling.

The hops shortage, caused in part by the rising number of micro-breweries popping up across North America recently, as well as a drought in Australia and poor crop yields in other countries, has resulted in a crisis in the brewing industry.

Although small pockets of producers exist in Canada, North America's major hop growing regions are Washington, Oregon and Idaho. Currently, 95 percent of the hops Garrison uses are from the Pacific Northwest. Brian would

like to see that change. There's no reason why hops couldn't be grown right here in Nova Scotia on a more commercial basis, he says. "All they need is lots of sun, lots of rain and good soil." All of which are plentiful in Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley. In fact, in the past, many farms in the area, including Ross Farm, grew their own hops for making bread and brewing beer.

"They made something called spruce beer," says

Barry Hiltz, manager of Ross Farm. Staff at the farm dress in period clothing and grow heritage varieties using the same tools and technology as the original settlers. Since hops were already growing on site, says Hiltz, it was fitting to simply expand the hop yard. Two varieties of hops—Cascade and Willamette—were planted last May. It takes a couple of years for hops to get established, but the staff is already looking forward to the first harvest.

Brian Titus hopes the experimental hop yard will inspire others to consider growing hops on a commercial basis. One farmer who has already hopped on board, so to speak, is Josh Herbin, owner of Lazy Acres Farm just outside Wolfville. Herbin currently has four varieties thriving in his organic one-acre hop yard. And a few others are following Herbin's lead. "I would say in the next year or two we'll have a couple of people come to market with a moderate amount of Nova Scotia-grown hops," says Titus. What's more, a few farmers in the area have started to experiment with crops of malt and barley, a development which Titus finds very exciting. "I see a day coming soon," he says, "when we can brew a Nova Scotia beer from scratch using all local ingredients." What could be better than that?

JOYCE GLASNER



A worldwide shortage of hops led brewer Brian Titus to a source in his Nova Scotia backyard.

family visit to Ross Farm Museum in New Ross, Nova Scotia. Brian was admiring the Berkshire pigs and Silver Dorking poultry when he noticed hop vines flourishing on an old tripod-style trellis next to one of the buildings. The hops, he was told, had been there as long as anyone could remember. It would be "kinda neat," he thought, to plant an experimental hop yard on the farm. He

made with far more hops than commercial beer; hence their distinctive taste. When

## A Nova Scotia brewer sets his sights on Nova Scotia hops.

Brian started Garrison 12 years ago, hops were plentiful and reasonably priced, but trouble was a brewing. In 2007, Garrison introduced a pale ale that requires 12 times more hops than regular ale. The hop-heavy Im-