

ITALY

Pink Hops

by Isabella Franceschini





Grattacoppa (Ravenna), Società Agricola Bellavista delle Sorelle Nati (The Nati Sisters' Bellavista Farm Company). The delicate phase of choosing the most suitable shoots to be guided onto a metal wire to support their growth. Hops are climbing plants that reach a height of 5 metres at harvest time. They are grown in rows roughly 3 metres apart with a space of 50 cm between each individual plant in each row.



WOMEN, AGRICULTURE, INNOVATION AND A VERY SPECIAL PLANT

“Hops? What are they? I want to farm them too.” When Anna saw hops for the first time on a trip to Slovenia, her curiosity was pricked and the experience planted the seed of an idea to start farming a crop with apparent similarities to grapevines, already a part of her family heritage.

In fact, when she inherited the farm in 2018 following the death of its founding father, grandmother Anna chose to diversify production and introduce the cultivation of hops, a crop that could be farmed largely using mechanized means and one that does not require a large exertion of physical energy. Her three daughters and two grandchildren joined with her to form the first farm company composed of three generations of Italian women to grow hops.

Currently 98% of the hops used in Italy are imported from Germany and the United States, the world's largest producers.

“The company philosophy is a social one, with a female perspective focused on valuing the local area” explains the progenitor of these female digital farmers. Their approach has enabled the cooperative to develop transversal projects for processing hops, like the production of the first beer to be brewed using fresh “made in Italy” hops and essential oil for use in herbal medicines and gastronomy.

This greener, more digital form of agriculture aims to rise to the challenge of environmental sustainability in line with the roadmap plotted by the European New Green Deal that outlines a reduced use of pesticides and fertilizers, the reuse of waste matter, a rationalization of water use and an increase in biodiversity, in addition to the deployment of new technologies.



Grattacoppa (Ravenna), Società Agricola Bellavista delle Sorelle Nati (The Nati Sisters' Bellavista Farm Company). Three generations of women farmers work to remove leaves. The harvested hop bines are funnelled into the hop-picking machine that separates the plants' flowers and transforms the residues into small parts that can be used as fertilizer in the fields. From right, mother Anna (74), her children Elisa (50) and Michela (46, with the scythe). Daniela (top, 51) cleans the excess out of the machine, granddaughters Marta (22) and Elena (20) sweep up.




Grattacoppa (Ravenna). The women's names are written on the cups they use during the snack break.



Grattacoppa (Ravenna). Daniela Nati in the hop kiln where the freshly harvested hops are placed. Slow drying preserves the active ingredients contained in the hops (the flower's yellow pollen) and takes place overnight for 8 to 10 hours at a controlled temperature of 45/49°. 1000kg of fresh hops produces around 300 kg of dried product.



Grattacoppa (Ravenna), Società Agricola Bellavista delle Sorelle Nati (The Nati Sisters' Bellavista Farm Company). The businesswomen and workers in the fields for the training of the shoots, a phase in which the best suited shoots are chosen to be entwined in the guide wire, which will help them grow vertically. The hop field has a lattice (made of wire, rope, coconut yarn or organic plastic) attached to the structure at a height of 5 metres and to the ground at the base of the plant.

A close-up photograph showing a person's arm and hand, wearing a black nitrile glove, reaching into a large, deep metal container filled with a massive pile of freshly harvested hop flowers. The hops are a vibrant green color and have a bumpy, textured appearance. The person's hand is positioned in the center-left of the frame, with fingers slightly curled as if picking up or sorting through the hops. The background is a plain, light-colored metal wall. The lighting is bright, highlighting the texture of the hops and the person's arm.

Grattacoppa (RA). Celeste checks the hop flowers to remove the last leaves. In order to farm more efficiently, the cooperative grows four varieties of American hops that reach maturity at different times between August and September.



Sarsina (Forlì-Cesena). Michela Nati sniffs the fresh hop flowers inside a still. An essential oil for use in herbal medicine is extracted from the hop flower using steam distillation.

Grattacoppa (Ravenna). Work tools in the back of Elisa's pink Ape three-wheeler van: scissors, a scythe, a kneepad and a tool used for inserting the metal supports that hold up the shoots as they grow.





Grattacoppa (Ravenna). From left: Celeste runs her hand through the hops as they come out of the hop-picking machine. Elisa checks that the container only holds the flowers and not leaves. Marta picks out any waste matter.

Grattacoppa (Ravenna). A pair of gloves on a tool for inserting the guide pole into the ground, at the centre of each new plant.





Grattacoppa (Ravenna). Michela Nati, flanked by her sister Daniela drives the tractor that pulls the bine loader that harvests the hops in the fields. The hop bines can scratch so protection is required.

Grattacoppa (Ravenna). A decorative garland
of hops that Anna has collected.





Sarsina (Forlì-Cesena). Michela Nati watches the distillation of fresh hops at a local company. The distiller sniffs the essential oil that has been extracted using steam. The circular bio-economy, traceable throughout all phases of processing thanks to a QR-Code, has a positive effect on the local area from both an environmental and social point of view.



Grattacoppa (Ravenna). Daniela prepares small garlands of hops for the party to celebrate the end of the harvest. During the event, which is held in the hop garden, a new beer scented with fresh hops is to be presented. The beer is the result of a partnership with a local brewery.



Grattacoppa (Ravenna). During the harvest Michela Nati accompanies visitors to see the hop vines.



Grattacoppa (Ravenna). Clothes hung out to dry outside the house near the fields.



Grattacoppa (Ravenna). In the hop fields, Daniela Nati gathers some hop bines that have escaped the reaches of the mechanical harvester.



Grattacoppa (Ravenna). Società Agricola Bellavista delle Sorelle Nati (The Nati Sisters' Bellavista Farm Company). Daniela (on the ladder) adjusts the tube where the waste comes out. From left, Celeste and Michela. The short supply chain that entails zero food-mile production and processing (and a preference for local employees and partner companies) is more sustainable for the planet, emitting fewer emissions and waste, reducing reliance on imports and providing more added social value.



Grattacoppa (Ravenna). Using a small scythe Michela Nati guides the bines into the hop-picking machine where they will be cleaned and the flowers separated from the rest of the plant.

