

The Peach Variety Situation In Virginia

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Virginia, the eleventh ranking state in the country in peach production, presents a fairly stable picture with reference to peach varieties. Yet there is much thought and some action toward use of recent introductions for specific purposes, in the newer plantings. In this article a brief general discussion of state varietal trends during the past ten years will be followed by a listing and discussion of present trends and thoughts respecting peach varieties.

A One-Variety State

Virginia is essentially a one-variety state so far as peaches are concerned. The plantings are probably more nearly restricted to a single variety than are those of any other state. The last accurate census of Virginia peach trees was made ten years ago, in 1937. At that time 68 per cent of all trees were of the Elberta variety. During the elapsed decade since then, there have been some apparent shifts in the minor varieties grown, but the proportion of Elbertas in total new plantings has remained about the same. If anything, the proportion of Elbertas appears to have increased, so that this variety probably comprises about 70 per cent of the present peach tree population.

The percentage of Virginia peaches marketed as Elbertas is probably somewhat above 70 per cent. Some growers believe it to be a market advantage to offer other yellow freestones, of comparable maturity season, as Elbertas. Consequently, peaches of the Brackett, Gage Elberta, Shippers Late Red, and occasionally even of the J. H. Hale varieties, are sometimes sold under the Elberta name.

Minor Varieties, 1937-1947

In 1937 the J. H. Hale peach ranked second among peach varieties in the state with 11 per cent of total trees; Belle of Georgia third with 10.7 per cent; Carmen fourth with 1.6 per cent, and Hiley fifth with 1.1 per cent of total peach trees. During the few years following 1937 there were marked increases in the plantings of the varieties Red Bird, Golden Jubilee, Brackett and Shippers Late Red. Plantings of Red Bird have practically ceased. Golden Jubilee is waning in popularity because it ripens unevenly, often producing a large proportion of fruits with a "green cheek". In some years the fruit of Jubilee shows a marked tendency to cling and to produce split pits. Brackett plantings, while never large, have decreased for several years; while producing large, good quality fruit, this variety is quite uneven in production in this area.

More recent trends in varietal plantings have emphasized the Halehaven, with smatterings of Fireglows, Sunhighs and a few of the other newer peaches. The Halehaven, at least up to 1947, is still holding its own in Virginia plantings, even though it has been dropping out farther south. The smoother skinned July Elberta has been displacing Halehaven in some states, but requires a more exacting spray schedule to produce fruit free of brown rot. Varieties which tend to brown rot easily are apt to be discriminated against by Virginia growers choosing varieties for new plantings. The decline in J. H. Hale plantings is at least partly ascribable to the susceptibility of its fruit to brown rot.

Present Peach Varietal Trends in Virginia

(1) **Elberta predominates.** That this is predominantly an Elberta state and promises to continue this tendency for some years to come needs to be emphasized again. Virginia's Elberta season falls in a rather fixed marketing "niche", the time of which cannot be changed over night. The desirability of higher quality fruit for different purposes and other seasons are resulting in other—although minor and somewhat exploratory—trends.

(2) **Varieties for freezing.** There is interest in varieties which are adapted for quick freezing, and this interest is resulting in plans for plantings of varieties for this purpose. Such interest is mainly fostered by cold storage companies which have been freezing comparatively large quantities of Elbertas

for several years and are not satisfied with this variety for freezing. This has already resulted in some small experimental plantings of Redhaven, Dixigem, July Elberta, Sunhigh, Redskin, and other "non-browning" varieties which, collectively, have a ripening season over a period of several weeks, a point of advantage to the freezers.

(3) **Clings for canning.** Another trend is toward the planting of canning-cling peaches, which to date is confined to the Ambergem variety. There are about 20,000 Ambergem trees in Virginia orchards now, practically all of which have been planted since early 1946. This number of trees may be doubled within the next few years. While these Ambergems are found in the orchards of several growers, their planting has been fostered chiefly by a single company. One of the largest Ambergem plantings is pictured in the accompanying figure.

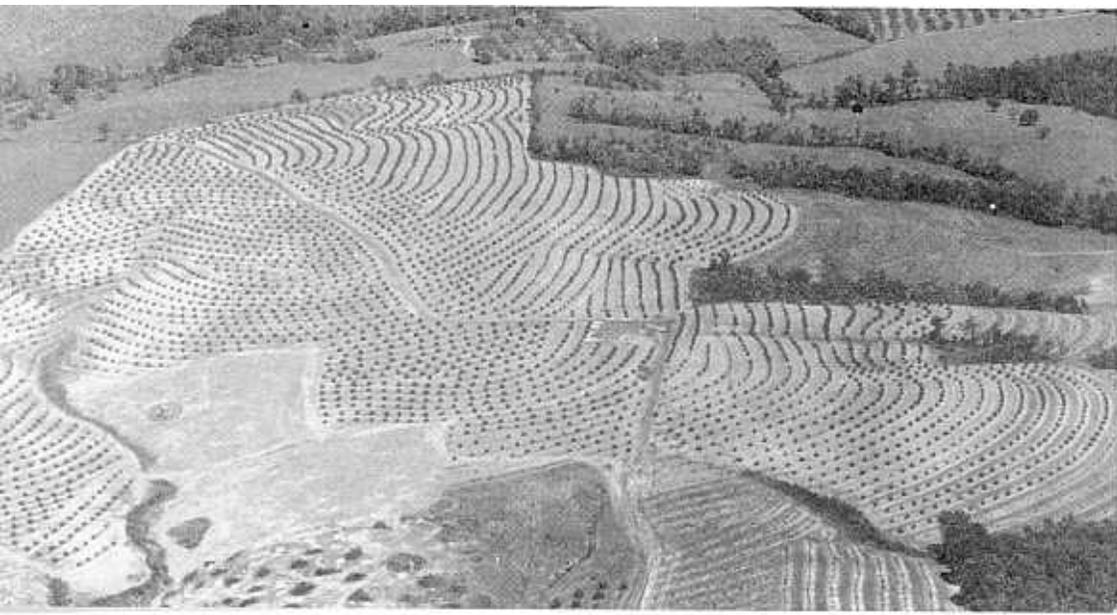
(4) **Earlier ripening varieties.** Yet another trend — which is still much more pronounced in the thinking than in the plantings of Virginia growers— is toward the use of earlier ripening varieties. It is recognized that there is a definite place for a limited earlier crop for local home canning and consumption, especially since in the last few years there has been an increasing amount of earlier home canning from southern grown peaches. In addition, there is the possibility of capturing some of the earlier metropolitan markets now being supplied by peaches from farther south. John T. Bregger, Chairman of the A. P. S. Variety Ap-

praisal Committee, in his talk before the Virginia State Horticultural Society on December 3, 1947, graphically emphasized a pertinent point in this connection. He stated that the peach production peak for the whole country occurs from one to two weeks ahead of the peak Elberta harvest in Virginia. Consequently, earlier Virginia grown varieties should probably be selected to ripen at least two to four weeks ahead of our Elbertas for best market acceptance.

(5) Peaches for roadside markets.

There is some increase in quantities of peaches being marketed from roadside stands. Some of these stands only serve as an outlet for a small part of the production of large orchards. But there is a minor trend toward the growing of a number of varieties which ripen consecutively from earliest to latest periods during the season. One grower, for example, who has thirty-odd varieties in about 40 acres of orchard, starts with Mayflower, Uneda and Mikado, and has ripe fruit until his Elbertas are gone; all fruit is sold from the stand,

Aeroplane view of a part of a new peach orchard planted solidly to Ambergems. This orchard belongs to the National Fruit Products Company, Inc., and is situated on Timber Ridge, in the western part of Frederick County, Virginia, very near the Virginia - West Virginia state boundary. The older trees, in the top of the picture, were planted in the spring of 1946, the others in 1947. At the time this picture was made, the orchard contained about 8500 trees (not all of which are shown). By the time the 1948 spring plantings are completed, this 180 acre orchard will contain 10,000 Ambergem trees. (Photo courtesy the National Fruit Products Company.)



and only prime tree-ripened fruit is offered. There are other similar ventures and they are tending to increase.

(6) **Late varieties to ship south.** There is a growing interest in the production of late peaches, following Elbertas, for shipment to southern markets — when consumers in these areas are again peach hungry. Some growers in Patrick and Carroll counties have been profitably increasing this practice for several years, and others are considering it.

The Broad Picture

Elberta is "the peach" in Virginia.

Its advantages are appreciated. Also, its limitations in quality, in hardiness, in suitability for quick freezing, and in spread of maturity are recognized. As a result, many other varieties are being grown and tried for various purposes. The trends involving these other varieties are still largely in the experimental stage. The varietal picture is not apt to change markedly or rapidly until some of these minor trends prove really profitable to the growers who are testing them.



National Survey of Plum, Cherry and Grape Varieties

By John T. Bregger, Chairman
Variety Appraisal Committee

Following the grower surveys of apple, peach and strawberry varieties presented in previous issues of this magazine, we are now in a position to report on other fruits. During 1947 consideration was given to plums, sour and sweet cherries and grapes. These fruits are less widely planted than those previously surveyed but nevertheless are of

considerable commercial importance in certain districts.

The summarized survey data are presented on a regional basis. The southern states are not included due to inadequate coverage and to the fact that the production of these fruits is of minor importance. California has not yet reported.

Commenting briefly on the highlights of the survey, it will be noted that in