

The Blue Pearmain

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Among the many old apple varieties which have fallen into disuse is the Blue Pearmain, a remarkable and unusual fruit on several counts. First mentioned in William Kenrick's "New American Orchardist" (Boston, 1833), it was doubtless cultivated long previous. It is thought to be of New England origin, but time and place are unknown.

In 1893 Dr. Bailey reported that the Blue Pearmain ranked second in commercial importance in the Northwest, but was little known in the East. Specimens exhibited at the Columbian Exposition that year measured fourteen inches in circumference.

The Blue Pearmain is readily recognized by its large, somewhat ribbed fruits, dark red with large conspicuous dots and a remarkable "powder blue" bloom which covers much of the surface thickly and distinguishes it from all other apples. It has a distinct and pleasing flavor and aroma which, with its unusual beauty, makes it an agreeable dessert fruit. It is especially good served with cheese, which seems to bring out its flavor. Its chief fault is a lack of juiciness in the flesh, a tendency to shrivel if kept too long in storage, and the fact that the tree in some regions is reported to be a not very heavy cropper.

Though not considered a culinary sort, the Blue Pearmain makes a surprisingly good pie, unlike that made from more acid fruit, but with a strong rich flavor of its own. An old country dish of northern New England was Blue Pearmain apple rings fried in butter.

Robert Hogg, the great British pomologist, remarked that "pearmain" (*Pyrus Magnus*) denoted a large, pear-shaped apple, but the world is now loosely applied, and the Blue Pearmain is not pear-shaped or conical.

It is recognized by pomologists as the prototype of a family of apples with certain characteristics in common, and following are a few once well known or deserving members of the family:

Jewett's Red or Nodhead appeared in the orchard of one Deacon Stephen Jewett at Hollis, N.H. about 1780. This is the only member of the family which seems to be cultivated today. It still appears from time to time in small quantities in local markets in Maine and New Hampshire, and, as it is still well known in those regions for its pleasant dessert qualities, it finds buyers. It bears some resemblance to the Blue Pearmain, though the fruits are smaller, the bloom thinner, and the dark red skin usually shows some greenish ground color. The tree is the slowest grower of any of the family but an unusually early bearer.

Baxter or Red Pound is an old Canadian apple. The tree is a very strong, rapid, upright grower, making thick sturdy shoots. The apples are large and handsome, and though not rated of high quality, possess a very pleasant flavor. The tree is noted for its hardiness, vigor, productivity, and resistance to fungus diseases.

Forest Rose. A beautiful, trim, dark crimson fruit, smoother skinned than the others, with a beautiful bloom, and a good keeper. The flesh is crisp, yellowish, and possesses the true pearmain flavor. Locally circulated in Ohio over a hundred years ago by traveling grafters, the writer knows of only one tree in that state, in Belmont County, from which his tree was propagated. I have never seen any reference to the variety in print. The owner of the tree suggested that it was named for the heroine of some long forgotten romantic Indian novel. "The Forest Rose", a comedy by Samuel Woodworth (author of "The Old Oaken Bucket") was first produced in 1825 and was immensely popular. Perhaps this attractive apple commemorates the first really American comedy, played by some wandering theatrical troupe along the Ohio River.

Black Oxford. Not of high quality, this apple was once prized in Maine, its native state, for its very late keeping qualities (May). It was named for the little village of Oxford, in Oxford County, where it originated. The skin is a peculiar brownish black tinged with dark reddish purple. At a little distance the apples look like lumps of coal. The size is medium, the tree very hardy

and prolific. Professor Hansen reported in 1903 that trees top-worked to this variety did well at Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Red Winter Pearmain. Not one of several old apples known by this name, but a tree (now cut down) which grew at the old Shaker settlement at Enfield, N. H. It was apparently an unknown seedling of the Blue Pearmain. Brighter red, somewhat the color of a Tompkins King, with little bloom, and considerably juicier, the fruit in size, shape and flavor is very like its parent. It keeps in common cellar storage in the north well into April with flavor and juiciness unimpaired, and without shriveling, making it perhaps potentially the most valuable member of the family.

Scarlet Beauty. This curious apple is of poor quality and keeps but a short time in early fall. It grows too large—the writer knows of one specimen that weighed thirty ounces. It is a prodigious bearer and fruits remarkably early. Trees scarcely out of the nursery row are sometimes laden down with enormous crops. The flesh is very mild subacid and except for a faint suggestion of the pearmain, destitute of flavor. The fruit is magnificent looking, but it is merely a horticultural curiosity. It is a strong, spreading grower in spite of its heavy fruiting habit. It was introduced by the Van Dusen Nurseries many years ago.

There are numerous other varieties related to the Blue Pearmain, with certain distinguishing characteristics which

are recognized by pomologists, to which the writer in all modesty would add the old Black Gilliflower with its strong aromatic fragrance and perhaps the Westfield Seeknofurther—the best in quality of them all. Taking into consideration the desirable attributes of health and hardiness that the whole family seems to enjoy, together with a distinc-

tive flavor readily recognized, it is to be regretted that none of our experiment stations seems to have used the Blue Pearmain or any of its relations in apple breeding programs: or at least, has not yet given us a new apple with qualities most sought for today, and the pearmain flavor for welcome variety.



The Galbraith Baldwin

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In 1934, a small branch on a Baldwin tree located in Block O, one of the old experimental blocks of the Massachusetts Agricultural Experiment Station, was observed to produce five highly colored apples. This branch was first noticed by Floyd Galbraith who worked in the Station orchards at that time. The sport has since been called "Galbraith."

One year shoots from the sporting branch were top-grafted on a tree in the spring of 1935 to see if the high color could be maintained. After the grafts had been known to produce highly colored apples, trees were propagated from them and planted in a new stock orchard. The trees were planted in 1939 and have now borne two crops of highly colored apples in contrast to

regular Baldwins growing adjacent to them.

About two weeks before Baldwin harvest the Galbraith Baldwin takes on considerable red color and by harvest time it is an over-all red which extends all the way into the calyx end of the apple. The red is of medium shade, not quite as bright as Gallia Beauty nor as dark as Starking. It is very attractive and has a certain snap to it. The apples appear to be the same as regular Baldwin in all respects except color. Galbraith Baldwin apples have a uniform shade of red in contrast to regular Baldwin which may vary from dark to bright and snappy to dull.

While the popularity of Baldwin has declined slightly in recent years, the Galbraith strain of Baldwin appears to be superior to any Baldwin now being propagated and certainly is worthy of consideration by those who wish to continue growing the variety.