Peach Cultivars — Northeast Region

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The Northeast region is one of the more diverse regions. We have broken it down into 4 areas:

1. New Jersey, eastern Maryland, southeastern Pennsylvania
2. Shenandoah Valley
3. Michigan—southern Ontario
4. New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, New England

Areas 1 and 3 have the largest acreage of peaches. There are three principal outlets for peaches and nectarines in this region: 1) shipping of freestone peaches for fresh use, 2) pick-your-own and local market (includes nectarines), and 3) processing clingstones, primarily Michigan and Ontario. Hardiness, Valsa or perennial canker, and bacterial leaf spot are problems in most of the region.

Processing clingstones are grown mainly in Michigan and southern Ontario with a few in Pennsylvania and New York. At the present time Babygold 5 and Babygold 7 are the standards but these are susceptible to bacterial leaf spot and the wood is weak. Spartancling from Michigan and Veecling from Vineland, Ontario, have been introduced as earlier ripening cultivars for trial. The need is for more health and cold hardiness with even better flavor and an extended season of harvest. The emphasis would be on still earlier cultivars in this Northeast region.

Nectarines do not have a large place in the Northeast. Here, the nectarines from California in the large supermarkets establish a base price for nectarines throughout the season. However, it is possible for good peaches in the Northeast to go into wholesale markets, and hence into the chain stores, at prices above California nectarines. Until now, therefore, growers for wholesale markets feel they can grow good peaches more cheaply than they can grow good nectarines. When we develop beautiful nectarine cultivars, with the delectable flavor that lives up to the image of nectarines in history and poetry, and that arrive and stay in good condition on the fresh fruit counter, then nectarines will command a premium over the best fresh peaches. We know such excellence only in tree-ripened fruit with nonmelting flesh, and only fruit with nonmelting flesh can be tree ripened and still be in good condition when it reaches the fresh fruit counter. Present nectarine cultivars that can be, and are, novelty leaders for roadside markets and pick-your-own are listed in Table 1.

There could be a limited place for white-fleshed peaches if breeders could develop firm-fleshed selections that retained the aroma classically associated with white peaches.

The standard, yellow-fleshed, freestone cultivars are listed in Table 2.

Table 1. Nectarines for the Northeast.

Hardy & Healthy	Hardy	White
		Morton
Rh	Independence	
Harko		
Hardired		
Nectared 4	Mericrest	
Lexington		Nectarose
Nectared 6		Nectaheart
	Stark Redgold	Lafayette
Elb		Nectaheart
		Nectalate
	Nectrared 10	

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Note that Redhaven is the main cultivar for the region. An early-ripening cultivar is needed in the season ahead of Redhaven.

No one late-maturing cultivar is outstanding. Each area has its own "best" cultivar and all are looking for replacements. There is need for a cultivar ripening just before the Blake-Elberta season. In the Blake-Elberta season, also, each area has chosen its present most acceptable cultivar, but there is no one outstanding cultivar.

In the season after Elberta, in the areas where late peaches can be ripened satisfactorily, Rio Oso Gem is preferred, but only because there is nothing better. Each of the cultivars listed in Table 2, even Redhaven, has its faults.

Many cultivars are being tried to fill these "holes" (Table 3). Most of these are too new to have really proven their worth yet, but, already, each has shown one or more weaknesses in different areas.

In the season before Redhaven, in the areas where hardiness is a real problem—New York and New England—Brighton from New York and Reliance from New Hampshire should not be forgotten. In this season before Redhaven, hardy, healthy, nonmelting clingstones of high edible quality might find a place.

In the season after Redhaven and before Sunhigh and Loring, there is a long list of cultivars being tested. But, none has performed well enough to be a standard cultivar.

There are fewer cultivars to choose from in the Blake-Cresthaven season and later. Each of these cultivars on trial has likewise shown one or more weaknesses.

As stated earlier, the principal problems are hardiness, disease resistance

Table 2. Standard cultivars for the Northeast region.

	Areas			
Cultivar	NJ	Shen	Mich.	NY
Garnet Beauty	+			
Redhaven				
Sunhigh				
Canadian Harmony				
Loring				
Halehaven				
Blake				
Cresthaven				
Redskin				
Elberta				
Rio Oso Gem	++++		++	

Table 3. New cultivars for the Northeast.

Before Redhaven

Harbinger	Sweethaven
Hamlet	Brighton
Correll	Sentinel
Candor	Pekin
Harbelle	Reliance

Between Redhaven and Loring

Harken	Cullinan
Vivid	Norman
Clayton	Jayhaven
Harvester	
Topaz	

After Loring

Redkist	Havis
Ellerbe	Autumnglo
Madison	Sweet Sue
Vanity	Marhigh
Biscoe	

—especially to Valsa canker and bacterial leaf spot—and greater firmness. But, as Savage has pointed out in the *American Fruit Grower* (1977) and "The Peach Cultivar Situation in the Southeast," p. 23—who is going to do it? Funds for tree fruit breeding and for training fruit breeders are diminishing rapidly, programs are being terminated as the present breeders retire, advanced generation germplasm is being lost.

The Peach Cultivar Situation in the Southeast

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The peach cultivars which are grown in the Southeastern United States tend to change more rapidly than in many other peach growing sections. The reason for this is the short life problem which limits the economic life of an orchard to 8-10 years. Therefore, there is no inclination to hold on to a cultivar which is poorly adapted or insufficiently productive to make it worthwhile.

Another factor which determines the cultivars that may be grown in a given area of the southeastern United States is the average number of cold hours below 45° F. available. Basically, there are three climatic zones in the southeastern peach producing area namely, the southern section averaging 550 to 650 hours of cold, the middle section from 650 to 850 hours, and the northern sections cold hours starting at 850 and ranging upwards. These climatic zones definitely limit the cultivars which may be successfully grown. For example, in the southernmost peach section no attempt should be made to grow any cultivar requiring more than 650 hours of cold. In this section there would be insufficient cold to break the rest period of cultivars having a higher requirement. Conversely, in the northern peach growing sections of the southeast for success, no cultivar should be planted that has a cold requirement of less than 850 hours. Cultivars requiring less initiate growth early in the spring and are often severely injured by freezes occurring in February and early March. Production because of blossom and bud injury is low.

Elberta and Hiley were the principal cultivars during the early 1940's and early 1950's. Few trees of these cultivars can be found now in the southeast. However, since it is so well known, Elberta is still used as an index point in describing cultivars developed since the 1950's.

In the southeast at the present time, the principal cultivar in the very early slot is Camden ripening some 58 days before Elberta. It has been heavily planted in South Carolina. It is relatively small and somewhat subject to split-pitting. Following Camden and ripening 55 days before Elberta are: Springold, Harbinger, Bicentennial. Springold is by far more widely planted even though it is genetically small. In the 50 days before Elberta season, Springcrest, Springbrite, and Sunbrite are the principal cultivars. Springcrest is the most popular of these three. It is interesting to note that California has set more than 2,500 acres of this cultivar which was developed in the southeast. It should

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