Evaluating Peach Varieties

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Few realize that a new peach variety must qualify with a high score on about 50 points before it can be accepted as a commercial variety.

An evaluation chart developed at the South Haven Experiment Station during 27 years of peach breeding contains the following tree and fruit characteristics that must be considered for each new variety under trial before it is accepted or rejected:

Tree Characteristics

General: Vigor, size, structure, set of fruit buds, hardiness in wood and bud, productiveness, and susceptibility to insects and diseases.

Leaves: Size, color, and presence or absence of glands.

Flowers: Time of blossoming, size, color, fertile or sterile, and susceptibility to frost.

Fruit Characteristics

General: Season of maturity, length of ripening season, ripens evenly or unevenly, ease of picking, injury in picking, fruit dropping when mature, size, shape, position of suture and apex, color, smoothness of surface, susceptibility to insects and diseases, handling, shipping, and keeping qualities.

Skin: Thickness, toughness, amount of fuzz, susceptibility to cracking, and ease of removal in processing.

Flesh: General color, color at the pit, firmness, texture, dry or juicy, quality, susceptibility to browning, and processing ability—both for canning and freezing.

Stone: Free, semi-cling or cling, and size.

Other characteristics would need to be added to the chart in other peach producing areas. For instance, the amount of chilling required to break the rest period of different varieties is of great importance in the South and in southern California.

Frequently a weakness is only one of the characteristics listed is sufficient to cause rejection of a variety. We have a seedling peach at the South Haven Station that apparently has everything a commercial peach needs, except that it has such a short stem and deep stem cavity that the skin of the peach is frequently broken in picking. This one flaw resulted in discarding this variety.

Recently an unusually promising seedling had to be discarded because of excessive dropping of the fruit as soon as mature. Some varieties, like Redhaven, for example, will hang on the tree for two weeks or more after reaching maturity.

The ability of the variety to make a good processed product must not be overlooked. A very high percentage of peaches grown in the country are processed, either commercially or at home. The freezing of peaches has created a demand for varieties with flesh that does not turn brown on exposure to air. Freestone peach varieties of the future should be dual-purpose varieties, excellent both for fresh use and for processing.

Productiveness is essential in a successful peach variety. Buyers are willing to pay a premium for the beautiful J. H. Hale variety. However, the grower cannot afford to grow this variety in most

peach producing areas because of its unproductiveness.

So, it is apparent that a satisfactory peach variety must qualify on many points and be acceptable to both grower and buyer.

Let us consider briefly the most important qualifications of a peach variety from the grower's standpoint. Before planting a variety, the grower might well ask these questions:

1. Will the variety sell satisfactorily year after year? In other words, does it meet market and consumer demands?
2. Does the season of maturity fit into my production and marketing plans?
3. Is the variety suitable for processing?
4. Is the variety regularly productive?

Many promising new yellow fleshed, freestone seedlings are now under preliminary test at various experiment stations which produce medium to large fruits having bright, attractive color when the peaches are still firm; that ripen slowly and evenly; that have thick, tough, non-cracking skin almost completely free from fuzz; and that have bright colored flesh that is firm, fine-textured and non-browning. These varieties will apparently handle, ship, and keep considerably better than varieties now available. And they will have eye appeal. We should remember that the incentive for most sales is the attractive appearance of the product. These new varieties will be sufficiently attractive to stimulate sales.

There are other tests that these new varieties must pass before being released. They must be hardy and regularly productive and be generally satisfactory in the orchard. However, there is ample reason to believe that some of the new kinds now under trial will pass all of the required tests with a reasonably good score.

The future holds a lot of promise for better varieties of the Queen of Fruits.

Secor Apple Popular with Wisconsin Growers

William Leonard, President of the Jefferson County Fruit Growers Association, has high praise for the Secor apple. Quite a number of members of his association ordered test trees from the Wisconsin Horticultural Society some years ago and the variety has done exceptionally well in the Jefferson County area.

The reason Mr. Leonard praises the variety so highly is that it has excellent quality, and keeps until late in the season. He said there is a splendid market for it from January until April, and "I only wish I had about 2,000 bushels of them for late winter and early spring sales. They go like hot-cakes."

In the news letter of the Iowa Horticulture Society, Secretary William Collins gives this information about the variety.

"*Secor:* Originated in Ames, Iowa, by the Iowa State Agricultural Experiment Station (S. A. Beach). Introduced commercially in 1922. Salome x Jonathan;