

## Some Apple Varieties of Outstanding Flavor

ROBERT A. NITSCHKE

Birmingham, Michigan

Ten years ago, the writer started a fruit garden which soon became a test planting for apple varieties of high quality. Whenever an apple reported to have outstanding flavor was learned of—whether from the literature of pomology, or from amateur collectors, or from scientists working with varietal collections at state or federal experiment stations—scionwood was located, if possible, and the variety grown.

This collection now numbers more than 150 apple varieties, old, new, American and foreign, over half of which have fruited. Countless other varieties have been tasted, during travels, while exploring old orchards, through samples from friends and during visits to other collections. Based upon this experience in fruiting and testing dessert varieties, I have made a provisional selection of apples of outstanding flavor.<sup>1</sup> Although any such selection will never be final, even for the one who makes it, at least, it will provide some answer to the often asked and seldom answered question, "What are the best flavored apples?"

Except for the ratings in the older pomologies, of which Hedrick's *Cyclopedia of Hardy Fruits*, published forty years ago, is the most recent, there appears to be little American writing on this subject. A chapter in *The Anatomy of Dessert* (1934) by Bunyard, the English pomologist and con-

noisseur, does so in a delightfully entertaining manner for English apple varieties. In the list that follows, the reader should not be surprised that most of the names will be strange and unfamiliar and that almost none are available on the market.

### Very Early (Late July)

I start my list with IRISH PEACH (Early Crofton), an ancient Irish apple, green with faint red stripes, first described in 1820 in the Transactions of the London Horticultural Society. Its soft flesh has a fine aroma and without the tartness of most early apples. I have been told that some of the new Melba seedlings also rate high in quality. But usually the very early apples, most of which are of Russian ancestry, are too tart.

### Early (Early August)

LYMAN'S LARGE SUMMER was rediscovered by Ira Glackens<sup>2</sup> of New Hampshire and first thought to be a famous Maine apple, Cole's Quince; but Glackens believes, and I am now as certain as one can be of these very old varieties, that it is the "large fruit of surpassing excellence" first described by Kenrick in 1844 as Large Yellow Summer. It is a magnificent, large, green apple which, though ripening in early August, has the breaking, crisp, juicy flesh and clean pure

<sup>1</sup>In 1948, Richard M. Fagley made a "provisional listing" of 54 "best quality apple varieties" based upon the older American pomological literature. (See Vol. 3, No. 1, F.V.H.D., p. 23). Of these, I have grown or tasted all but the following seven: *Fall Wine*, Belmont, Bullock, *Melon*, Newtown Spitzenberg, *Swazie*, White Winter Pearmain (italicized varieties not yet located).

<sup>2</sup>Mr. Glackens, an author whose hobby is fruit collecting, has done much to locate the fast disappearing older American varieties. Others among his "finds" are Orenco, McLellan, Lady Sweet, and Swaar.

flavor, blending sweet and acid, of the finest winter apples; decidedly the best early apple. **EARLY JOE** and **PRIMATE** also rate high.

#### **Early Midseason (End of August)**

In 1888, Dr. H. E. Van Deman, U. S. Pomologist, said, "If I should be asked to select the choicest early autumn apple known to me, I should say the **JEFFERIS**. No family orchard should be without it". This encomium still stands. The rich pear-like flavor, juicy crisp yet tender and melting flesh of this medium-sized red, striped apple is unsurpassed. The hardy tree rates as high as the fruit, bearing a heavy crop every year.

**AMERICAN SUMMER PEARMAN** is almost as good, and so is that classic Danish apple, **GRAVENSTEIN**, with its fine-grained, crisp flesh that virtually dissolves in the mouth. A delightful autumn tidbit is the small **CHESTNUT CRAB**.

#### **Midseason (September)**

Now comes a flood of great apples. Early September brings **CHENANGO STRAWBERRY**, its green, sheepnose shape splashed and striped with pink. Of it Hedrick said, "In its season, Chenango is the apple of apples in taste, smell and appearance." A bowlful fills a room with its fragrance, but like many fruits for the amateur, it must be picked at exactly the right time to have it in its prime.

Then comes **SIGNE TILLISCH**, a large, green, Danish apple with red or orange blush, and with a delicious wine-like flavor equalled only by **Jefferis**.

The largest apple I know with superb flavor is **STEARNS**. Why is this magnificent apple unknown today? Although lacking in color, being an ordinary, red-striped apple of rather old-fashioned appearance, this huge

fruit has the melting texture of **Gravenstein** and the rich luscious pure apple taste of a **King**. It originated with C. L. Stearns, of North Syracuse, New York, and was propagated and sold from about 1910 to 1930. I have had fruit 13 inches in circumference on a five-foot dwarf tree in my garden. An amazing sight!

**MUSTER** is an old American red striped apple of unknown origin, first mentioned by Warder in 1867. H. P. Gould, U. S. D. A. Pomologist in the early 1900's, sent it to Pennsylvania State University. Professor William S. Clarke, of the University, from whom I received my scions, has written, "Mr. Gould thought it was the most pleasantly flavored apple variety with which he was acquainted. I would say that it is close to the top quality for a dessert apple." After tasting **Muster** here, I certainly agree with their rating. Its outstandingly rich flavor comes closest to **Cox Orange Pippin** of any apple that I know.

Other fine early September apples are **AKERO**, a fine looking Swedish apple with a raspberry tang; **RIBSTON PIPPIN**, an old English variety of high flavor and high Vitamin C content; **LAMB ABBEY PEARMAN**, a small English sweetmeat which came from a seed of **Newtown Pippin**; **ST. EDMUND'S PIPPIN**, an early English russet; "**FALL RUSSET**", an exceedingly high flavored small russet apple of unknown provenance which I found in a Franklin Hills orchard; and **DR. MATTHEWS**, an Indiana apple which keeps all winter.

In late September, the variety **MOTHER**, an old Massachusetts apple, now practically lost to cultivation in the United States, is ready to be picked. In England, where it is currently recognized as one of the finest fall apples, it can be found listed in any good nursery catalog under the

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name "American Mother". Downing, perhaps the greatest of American pomologists, reserved some of his strongest praise for Mother. "This admirable fruit is to our taste unsurpassed in flavor of any of its season, strikingly suggestive of the flavor and perfume of an excellent pear." It has a fine red skin with creamy yellow flesh inside and a uniform oval shape that feels good to hold in one's hand, and has been generally regarded by English and American pomologists (and by my family, friends and neighbors) as the best flavored fall apple.

COX'S ORANGE PIPPIN is best eaten at Christmas time; but since it ripens the end of September, it shall be described here; and it deserves a special place. In England, where the apple is king of fruits, Cox is considered to have the richest flavor, so much so, that a veritable "Coxomania" exists. A modern English pomologist, H. V. Taylor, writes, "All characters so admirably blended and balanced as to please palate and nose as no other apple can do, the superb flavour of the English grown Cox suffices to rank it as the greatest apple of this age and the readiest seller in all markets." Certainly its mellow, yellowish, juicy flesh merits special praise, its flavor lingering in the mouth like ice cream. It also makes the finest apple compote. Unlike many English varieties which do not like hot Michigan summers, Cox thrives in my garden.

### Late Midseason (Early October)

To my taste, TOMPKINS KING has no superior for size, beauty and flavor. It always seems to bring back boyhood memories of the way a real apple ought to taste. In addition to being of fine quality for eating out of hand, it is one of the finest of apples

for sauce, pies and "apple kuchen."

ORENCO is perhaps the most beautiful of all the fine-flavored apples. Medium large, shaped like King, it is a solid, bright scarlet red. I know nothing about the origin of this apple except that it was introduced in 1920 by the Oregon Nursery Company of Orenco, Oregon (now out of business). Why this superb variety has made no headway, I do not know. Its flesh is sparkling white, juicy, crisp and piquant.

Other high quality apples of this season are ORLEANS REINETTE, for those who like a nutty flavor in an apple, and two new varieties—MACOUN, a McIntosh × Jersey Black cross from the New York Experiment Station, and JUBILEE, a McIntosh × Grimes Golden cross from the Research Station, Summerland, B.C., Canada.

### Late (Late October)

There are many fine apples in this climax time of the apple season. For those who prefer a mild flavor, there is McLELLAN with its pure and delicate savor; FIRESIDE, superior to Delicious for a mild, sweet perfumed apple; and HUBBARDSTON NONESUCH, a large, rugged fruit with hard, crisp flesh and mild flavor. There is GOLDEN DELICIOUS with its characteristic luscious, yellow flesh, the only commercial variety in my list; and PRAIRIE SPY, from Minnesota, almost too highly aromatic and spicy. There is CANADA RED, an old Michigan favorite and still one of the most pleasantly flavored; and ESOPUS SPITZENBERG, that parent of Jonathan (itself a fine apple) planted as early as 1790, at Monticello, by Thomas Jefferson, and perhaps still the best of its type; and, finally, the incomparable GOLDEN RUSSET with its sugary juice that sticks to one's fingers like candy.

### Very Late (November)

The golden skinned CALVILLE BLANC d'HIVER needs a sunny spot to ripen fully, perhaps in memory of its ancient Normandy ancestry. Mentioned by Le Lectier in 1627, it is still served for dessert in the finest Paris restaurants. Its tender, spicy flesh with a delicate banana-like aroma belies its high Vitamin C content, in which characteristic it exceeds not only all other eating apples, but even the orange.

Also to be noted is SWAAR (meaning heavy) a fine old apple first grown by the early Dutch settlers along the Hudson River.

The season ends with a trio of one very old American apple and two newer ones which preserve their high eating quality throughout the winter into April and May. One of the newer varieties is MELROSE, a Jonathan × Delicious cross by Dr. Howlett, of the Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station (see F. V. H. D., Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 92, 1946). It is a rugged apple-like Hubbardston, but with a sugary sweetness tempered with just the right amount of lip-smacking tartness that gives it first rank among hard, crisp-fleshed eating apples.

The other is truly new. As yet unnamed, it is a seedling of Red Spy × Golden Delicious by Dr. Leo Klein, of the New York Agricultural Experiment Station, and currently goes under the designation New York E-6. Certainly this is one of the finest apples of all time. Uniformly large, crisp, juicy, its flavor is hard to describe. One is reminded sometimes of the sprightly juiciness of Northern Spy, sometimes of the rich sweetness of Golden Delicious, but more often, a delectable blend of the two that is like nothing else. Let us hope a fitting

name will be bestowed on this prodigy.

And the last is NEWTOWN PIPPIN (Yellow Newtown, Albemarle Pippin), the classic American apple, the only variety listed by Hedrick as "best". It is as good today as in 1759 when Peter Collinson, the British botanist, wrote, speaking of some Newtown Pippins given him by Benjamin Franklin, "what comes from you are a delicious fruit if our sun will ripen them to such perfection." Bunyard's description says all there is to say—"Newtown Pippin is supreme in its class, the aroma of pine and the refined flavor are worthy of all praise".

Perhaps to close the list, I should mention a few so-called sweet apples, those non-acid varieties whose character is too pallid for my taste but highly enjoyed by many. SWEET BOUGH opens the season in early August and SWEET DELICIOUS carries into winter. LADY SWEET, with a delicate, refined character befitting its name, is probably the best of this group.



### Rootstocks for Plums

Justin Brook, a British grower, makes the following comments (Commercial Grower, Sept. 11, '59): "As to (rootstocks for) plums, we use the Old English Greengage for all the gages, and Myrobalan B for all other plums. We are very careful to get the true Old English Greengage for budding. The Greengage stocks in this country are terribly mixed; and matters are made worse because Cambridgeshire growers who grow the Old English Greengage, refer to their plum as the Cambridgeshire Gage. It is of inferior quality and should not be used for budding."