

Newtown Pippin (Yellow Newtown)

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Celebrated since the earliest days of American history, the Newtown Pippin apple is probably the most famous of all American varieties. Its superior quality, as grown today in my Michigan garden, unquestionably merits this acclaim.

As early as 1759, Peter Collinson, a British botanist and collector, wrote John Bartram, the famous Quaker botanist, "We were badly disappointed, being in hopes of seeing some grafts of the true Newtown Pippin; but there were none. Pray remember another year; for what comes from you are delicious fruit if our sun will ripen them to such perfection. Our friend Benjamin (Franklin) had a fine parcel of the apples come over this year which I shared." Eventually Bartram sent grafts to England, and by 1768 Newtown Pippin was growing in the Brompton Park Nursery.

In March 1773 Thomas Jefferson recorded in his *Garden Book* that he had received grafts of Newtown Pippin from one Mordecai Debnam at Sandy Point, which were "ingrafted by P. Morton." And in March 1778 Jefferson noted that these trees were planted out at Monticello. The original tree is supposed to have stood on an estate in Newtown, Long Island, until 1804, when it died of exhaustion from excessive cutting of scions.

The variety has been widely grown in Virginia where it performs particularly well. It was brought to this state by a Dr. Walker of Albemarle County who, returning from Philadelphia after Braddock's defeat in 1755, brought scions in his saddle bags. The Virginia apple has long been known as "Albemarle Pippin."

In 1837 one Andrew Stevenson, from Albemarle County, Virginia, was U. S. Minister to the Court of St. James. He had some barrels of "Albemarle Pippins" sent from his own orchards for his own use, and presented several to Queen Victoria. She was so delighted with the excellence of the fruit that she removed the British apple tax from "Albemarle Pippins", and thus began a most extensive export trade in this apple. In fact, for years the Virginia crop was largely exported. The English, with their lack of sun and heat, could not grow Newtown Pippin well (Leroy said it was delicious grown on French soil) but nonetheless rated the imported fruit among the finest flavored eating apples. Since the English have always been especially fond of apples and particularly proud of their own fruits, this is indeed probably the highest recommendation which any American fruit could get.

In 1831 Ronalds, an English nurseryman, showed a colored illustration in his famous "Catalog" of selected apples and remarked about the pineapple flavor of the imported fruit. Brookshaw, in his classic work of hand colored fruit plates (*Pomona Britannica*), shows Newtown Pippin in Plate No. 93, executed in 1807; and his drawing shows the same scab and black spots which are difficult to prevent on Newtown Pippin even with modern sprays.

Lindley, in 1831, mentioned its "saccharin, exceedingly rich and highly aromatic flavor" and Hogg, the greatest of the English pomologists, called it a "dessert apple not to be surpassed." In 1897 the apple was reported to be selling for as high as 36¢

a pound in Covent Garden, or three times as much as other varieties. So valuable were Newtown Pippins in British markets that many spurious sorts were sold under this name. Of the modern imported apple, Bunyard, in 1920, said, "Newtown Pippin is supreme in its own class, the aroma of pine and the refined flavor are worthy of all praise."

American writers have been equally high in their praise of Newtown Pippin. Downing, after commenting on its "exceedingly high and luscious flavor... combined with long keeping qualities," said it stood at the head of all apples. Even then, however, he remarked upon its requirements for deep, warm, rich soil. He also thought it was not at its peak of finest perfection until March. Wickson, in 1889, said it was generally considered at that time the best winter apple in California.

In 1908, H. P. Gould, then U.S.D.A. pomologist, commented on its being planted less extensively due to cultural difficulties, although still grown throughout the Blue Ridge region because of the high export prices obtained for it. He pointed out that Newtown Pippin was usually a biennial cropper and sometimes did not produce a good crop more than once in four years. He also said that it seldom came into bearing until 10 or 12 years old, and that the trees did not produce full crops until they were 18 to 20 years old. The variety is now grown commercially only in a few orchards in Virginia, and on the West Coast, and may occasionally be found in specialty grocery shops in New York City in March and April.

The fruit of Newtown Pippin varies

markedly in size and color and quality because of differences in soil and climate. Here in Michigan it ripens the first week of November. It is fine grained, crisp, has a smooth texture, sweet-tart but with a fine, pure, clean, rich, apple flavor, almost pine-like. It keeps in prime condition throughout the winter. I have marked each year in my notes, "highest quality." In 1958 the skin was quite yellow with a red blush and almost every apple had smooth russet at the stem. Other seasons it has been usually plain green, but disfigured by scab and black spots.

One further mark of its quality may be noted. Commencing about 1890, the New York Experiment Station at Geneva, New York, began what was probably the greatest collection of fruits in America, and systematically over the years kept the most accurate and complete records of apple varieties that perhaps can be found anywhere in world literature. Starting in 1905 with publication of *The Apples of New York*, the New York Department of Agriculture published several volumes with colored illustrations and complete descriptions of most of these varieties of fruits.

Ulysses P. Hedrick, the renowned Director of the New York Experiment Station, who authored most of "The Fruits of New York" series, and who, therefore, had the opportunity to observe and taste perhaps as many varieties of fruit as any man who has ever lived, published in 1922 an encyclopedia of hardy fruits containing summaries of the data collected in the volumes published on the single fruits. In his *Cyclopedia*, Hedrick listed only one apple as "best". This was Newtown Pippin.*

*Among the winter apples of my acquaintance, I rank only two others equal of Newtown for dessert. These are strangely enough modern varieties—Melrose, originated by Dr. Howlett at the Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station (see Vol. I, No. 4, *Fruit Varieties and Horticultural Digest*, p. 92), and E-6, an as yet unnamed Spy-Yellow Delicious cross by Dr. Leo Klein of the New York Experiment Station.