

Fruit Tasting and Exhibiting in England

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In late November 1962 the Fruit Group of the Royal Horticultural Society, London, held an interesting experiment—a meeting to taste fruit. Just as people often meet to taste wines or cheese, it was believed by the Fruit Group Committee that members might welcome an opportunity to taste and sample different varieties of fruits, including some not commonly grown today. Thus they could compare them and decide which they would like to grow themselves. Announcement of the proposal was made at the annual dinner. The Society's Fruit officer decided which varieties of apples would be tested and a wide selection was brought up from the collection at Wisley.

The response of the members was so enthusiastic that the meeting promised to be one of the most popular in the history of the group.

Six varieties were assembled for general tasting—Ashmeads Kernel, (an old English winter russet dessert apple), Cox's Orange Pippin (the leading commercial dessert apple in England today, famous for its exquisite flavor), Golden Delicious, Kidds Orange Red (a New Zealand introduction: Cox's Orange x Delicious), Sunset (a 1920 Cox's Orange seedling), and William Crump (Cox's Orange x Winter Pearmain). The apples were peeled and sliced to avoid immediate identification as it was thought names could influence judgment. Members were asked to place the six in order of preference. When the names were disclosed and votes counted it was found that the oldest variety tasted, Ashmeads Kernel,

named about 1720, received the largest number of first place votes. Cox's Orange was second, followed closely by Golden Delicious and William Crump. Kidds Orange Red was fifth, and least popular was Sunset.

During the discussion which followed, the Chairman of the meeting, Mr. J. M. S. Potter, Director of the National Fruit Trials, where the apple collection numbers over 2500 varieties, pointed out that flavor and texture were influenced by the time of year that the varieties were tasted, and the soil and micro-climate in which they are grown. Thus the voters' decisions could be influenced by variable factors. Many members were, nonetheless, determined to add Ashmeads Kernel to their fruit gardens. (Ashmeads Kernel has proven to be a delicious dessert apple as grown in the Southmeadow collection here in southern Michigan).

Many other varieties were made available, for tasting, including Ribston Pippin, Orleans Reinette and Cornish Gilliflower—all high flavored English varieties which succeed here in southern Michigan. The tasting was such a success that the Fruit Group is planning another when a selection of pears will be provided.

The Fruit Group also maintains a table at each meeting of the Horticultural Society at which fruits are exhibited. During 1962, 317 exhibits of apples were shown, 55 of pears, and lesser numbers of the other fruits. Besides newer varieties, many older varieties were shown (I noticed Tompkins King, an old New York favorite and Pitmaston Pineapple, an old English sweetmeat) with names inviting

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inquiry into their origin and meaning. A plate of Red Late currents, although somewhat jaded, was exhibited as late as October 9, showing how long red currents will hang on the bush. An exhibit of Blenheim Orange apples from natural storage and in polythene bags showed how the use of polythene helped prevent shriveling. Other exhibits showed sports, frost damage, etc.

Notes accompany the exhibits regarding season and other points of interest regarding the variety shown.

A qualified attendant is supplied by the Fruit Group to answer inquiries regarding varieties to be grown, pruning, fertilizing, rootstocks, pollination, spraying, and storage and even bird control. The largest number of requests were to identify varieties.

It was of greatest interest that during 1962 nearly half of the exhibits came from small home gardens, estates, and research station collections.

During much of its century old existence, the American Pomological Society has played the principal role in this country in identifying varieties, giving recognition to new and superior fruits, and acting as a "great clearing house in which members from all over the continent could compare fruits and arrive at conclusions in regard to their merits." A review of the A.P.S. proceedings in the 19th Century gives an indication of the zeal with which specimens were submitted and examined. Committees of experts drawn from many states of the Union met and argued over the merits of respective varieties, and evaluated their performance in various climates and topography for both home and orchard. Astounding collections of varieties were exhibited for all to see and frequently to taste. In 1854 the then president of the A.P.S., the renowned Marshall P. Wilder, alone exhibited 273 varieties of pears, and another

member exhibited 145 varieties of apples. Reports from several state groups recording their careful observations were prepared and read. Information regarding varieties rejected and the reason therefor was just as valuable as the recommendations for cultivation.

Certainly today with the vast research and scientific breeding work of the experimental stations on the one hand, and on the other hand the growing interest in fruit varieties for the home garden as well as the market, there is again a need to make the A.P.S. a "great clearing house" for all interested in fruit and fruit growing, not just those with a professional or business interest.

Could not the A.P.S. provide the vehicle for the formation of a fruit group for the United States as has been done by the Royal Horticultural Society in England similarly to "serve as a common ground wherein private growers can exchange their experiences and methods and techniques with those of the professional grower and scientific investigator?" (R. G. Hatton, on the formation of the Fruit Group, Royal Horticultural Society, May 24, 1947).

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All issues are available except the following: Vol. 1, No. 2, Vol. 3, No. 2, 3, 4, and Vol. 5 No. 3. The preceding issues are now out-of-print.

The Society is interested in buying back a limited number of the issues that are out-of-print, at 35 cents per issue still in good condition.