

Apples for Dessert — a Second Look Part I

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In 1960, in an article entitled "Some Apple Varieties of Outstanding Flavor,"* the writer attempted a provisional answer to the question, "What are the best flavored apples?" noting that any such selection would never be final. Now, after five years of further testing, including the addition to the test collection of some seventy varieties—all reputed by some source to have outstanding quality—it seems worth while to take a second look at the earlier evaluation. Have the varieties then selected continued year after year to evoke the same favorable response? Have other varieties qualified to be included in the list?

To answer these questions, reliance has been placed not only on the personal tastes of the writer and his immediate family, but also on those of two groups of friends who rather consistently, each year, have constituted taste panels for testing the old against the new. Subjective as taste is, there has been a surprisingly broad area of agreement in the panelists evaluations. To afford some standard of comparison, McIntosh, for fall apples, and Delicious, for winter apples, were included at the taste sessions; but rarely did they fare well in the ratings.

Although in the earlier article the emphasis was on "flavor" as the prime attribute of quality (aroma is really one aspect of flavor), it has become clear that texture and juiciness are also of greatest importance. Hence, I have broadened the inquiry to include all dessert qualities. For ex-

ample, Esopus Spitzenberg has a marvelous flavor which assures its inclusion in any such list; yet among hard, crisp apples, its flesh has an aspect of toughness which must rank it below Spigold or Mutsu, both of which have crisp, cracking flesh, but with a juicy tenderness that is almost melting.

Generally speaking, the newer apples, especially the offspring of the experiment station breeding programs, excel in juiciness and texture if not always in flavor. N.J. 10 is a noteworthy example of this. Its flavor is nothing special, but its delicate yet crisp texture plus a marvelous juiciness which lasts into winter makes it an apple I would want to have.

Although beauty is another important quality in any apple, it is not stressed here, as it is basically a superficial characteristic, often covering a worthless interior. Nevertheless, one can still gratefully appreciate beauty. A few examples are Maiden Blush, with its delicate pale shadings; the petite Lady apple, with its striking contrasts of yellow and red; Almata, with its watermelon red flesh making a sensational dish of apple sauce; Spartan, with its dark mahogany red skin polishing to a mirror finish; and N.Y. 14-19, which is even darker in glistening hue.

I have not considered it important to rate cooking apples (for pies, tarts, compotes, sauce, baking, etc.) because my experience has been that many fine dessert apples also make the best cooking apples. For example,

*Volume 15, *Fruit Varieties and Horticultural Digest*, page 9 (September, 1960).

this winter, based on complete tests of every possible way to cook an apple, Calville Blanc passed with flying colors as the outstanding kitchen apple. Stearns, King, Signe Tillisch, Newtown Pippin, Spigold, Melrose and Mutsu are but a few others which serve outstandingly in the kitchen as well as for dessert.

None the less, flavor is still the prime factor—does it taste good? The comment of that eminent English connoisseur, P. Morton Shand, from his delightful essay, *Older Kinds of Apples* (1948), bears repeating:

"The shades of flavour which the Apple can offer are, sui generis, almost inexhaustible. In some of the choicer dessert varieties they are of the greatest refinement, the subtlest delicacy. It is in no sense an exaggeration to say that, except for the world's few really great wines, nothing we eat or drink presents such fascinating diversity of savour within the compass of a single generic type, or affords such rare delight to the epicure."

It must also be recognized that the author has not tasted every worthwhile apple, old,* foreign and new. However, there must always be a beginning; and since there can never be an end to finding and testing additional varieties, the following is offered for what it is worth until a better and more complete evaluation is available and possible. I would only add that there is still a regrettable

paucity of American writing on this subject.**

Very Early (Late July)

Irish Peach still holds as the best very early dessert apple. Most very early apples have a tartness, combined with a lack of refinement, that always makes most of them seem unfinished, as if nature was in too great a hurry to bring forth these productions. Some of the early Finnish apples, such as *Huvitus*, are not bad, but quite small and unattractive. *Ontario 272* (Melba x Red Astrachan) is good for size and appearance, but tart. *Mantet* is also good. At this time of year the connoisseur should really look to other fruits.

Early (Early August)

Again, *Lyman's Large Summer* continues to rank far and away as the very best. Indeed, I am always tempted to regard *Lyman's Large Summer* as one of the best of all apples, including the finest winter fruits, almost equal to *Newtown Pippin*, combining crisp, hard, juicy texture with the best of sweet and acid. But, of course, such an early apple will never keep long enough to make such a comparison possible. *Early Joe* still qualifies, but I would no longer include *Primate*, large but without distinction.

Early Midseason (End of August)

Again *Jefferis* is still tops and should

*Among the 54 "best quality apple varieties" which Mr. Richard Fagley, formerly Chairman of the Fruit Gardens Committee, listed from the older pomological literature, there were seven not yet located or tasted. Of these *Bullock* and *White Winter Pearmain* have now been located and fruited. *Fall Wine* and *Belmont* have been hopefully located but not yet fruited. *Swazie*, *Melon* and *Newtown Spitzenberg* have still not been located.

**A recent handbook of the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens containing some articles on home garden apple varieties describes little other than commercial varieties. The experiment station bulletins are also largely confined to an evaluation of commercial characteristics. As Chairman of the Fruit Gardens Committee, of the American Pomological Society, the author has been unsuccessful in getting the scientists at the experiment stations, working with some of the greatest variety collections in the country, to express themselves on the aesthetic aspects of flavor and quality.

be in every home garden, combining heavy, regular cropping with all its other great qualities. *American Summer Pearmain* is a little too spicy perhaps, and difficult to pick at the right time. *Gravenstein* does not come through in most hot Michigan summers with sufficient flavor. In many northern climates and a cool summer, it is still fine, but I am tempted to rate N.Y. E-18 (*Gravenstein*—open pollinated) ahead of it on every score. *Chestnut Crab* is still a delicious tidbit, for all its short and fleeting season.

Midseason (September)

As we now come to the full flush of the apple season, *Chenango Strawberry*, *Stearns* and *Signe Tillisch* still are unequaled among early September apples. Sometimes it seems to me that *Porter* should be included in this noble company. It is a beautiful pure yellow apple with a most artistic conical shape, a fine cropper, of excellent flavor, which years ago (when varieties were important to the housewife) was actually mentioned by name in the 1923 edition of Fanny Farmer's *Boston Cooking School Cook Book* for use in jelly.

Others which still hold their rank are *Akero*, slow to bear, but probably the best Swedish dessert apple—with a raspberry tang; *Lamb Abbey Pearmain*, making an ideal dwarf tree, the easiest to prune to restricted size and shape, yet bearing a heavy crop year in and year out. *St. Edmund's Pippin*, has a flawless, smooth, fawn-colored skin makes it the most beautiful of all russets, and with a rich pear-like flavor reminding one of the Seckel (Mr. Potter, Director of the National Fruit Trials in England, with some 2500 varieties to taste, regards it as probably the best flavored of all russets). *Fall Russet*, its small, russety, grayish green skin belying the sugary high flavor underneath, also ripens

into pear-like richness. *Ribston Pippin* year after year grows in my esteem. This fine old classic English fruit has a flavor more aristocratically austere and less florid than Cox, a pure, more refined richness of flavor. Its flesh is hard, crisp, fine grained, extremely sugary, and as Hogg, the great British pomologist of the Nineteenth Century said, "charged with a powerful aromatic flavour." *Ribston* does not color well, but its reinette-type skin, usually bright orange and flecked with red on the sunny side, has a beauty of its own. *Ribston* ripens earlier in Michigan than in England and does not keep well. It blossoms heavily and late and seems to need a good pollinator to crop well, but its superb qualities overcome whatever else it lacks.

In this season I would also add *Pitmaston Pineapple*, one of a class of old russeted English apples, which, although neglected today because of their small size, are veritable sweetmeats in flavor. It is golden yellow covered with a fine grayish russet. Its flesh is exceedingly juicy and sugary, with a "most deliciously scented and honeyed flavor" as Bunyard, England's greatest Twentieth Century pomologist has said. This apple is one of my favorites for dessert. As I walk past the tree to my car on a fall morning, it is a tempting morsel to put in one's pocket for munching on the way to the office.

Muster has not fared so well under the test of time. Its appeal seems not so much in richness as sweetness; yet I find many people who rave about it and some, like Mr. Gould, prefer it above all others for eating out of hand.

For late September apples I can add nothing to what I have said previously about *Mother* and *Cox's Orange Pippin*. They are a must in every garden, although I find that

Cox's Orange, just off the tree, does not quite have the characteristic richness of flavor which develops in higher degree as it mellows with age during the months of November and December. However, there are two other varieties which I must add for this season.

One is *Golden Nugget*, a 1932 cross of Golden Russet and Cox's Orange Pippin (from the Kentville, Nova Scotia Station of the Canadian Department of Agriculture), a small apple of Cox's size and appearance, but predominantly yellow-streaked, and splashed with bright orange, and more often spotted and netted with russet. It is sugary sweet, luscious in flavor, and one of the choicest dessert apples in my collection. But it has a short keeping life, and should be eaten soon after picking.

The other is *Ross Nonpareil*, an old Irish apple, small, russeted, usually with brilliant scarlet stripes. It has a high combination of sweetness and acidity, with a pronounced fennel flavor. Downing, probably the most famous of American pomologists, had it in his collection at Newburgh on the Hudson, and said of it in 1845 in his *Fruits and Fruit Trees of America*, "to our taste, one of the highest flavored and most delicious of all apples for dessert."

There is another late September variety to which I would give qualified approval on the basis of a few specimens which fruited this year. This is *Pink Pearl*, introduced by the California breeder, Albert Etter, in 1944. It has a strong, rich flavor and fine aroma and may have been generally ignored because it has pink flesh like its parent, Surprise (first noted in England in 1831). Unlike its parent's solid green skin, Pink Pearl has a more attractive cream and pale green coat with a light red cheek.

Strawberry Trials in Massachusetts

James F. Anderson reported on the more promising of the newer strawberry cultivars in Fruit Notes, based on their performance at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Some of his observations were as follows:

Fulton: Vigorous, productive, and free from leaf diseases, but not resistant to red stele. Fruit of medium size, very firm, and very good in flavor.

Fletcher: Large attractive fruit of good flavor. Is productive, and ripens midseason. Is not resistant to red stele.

Frontenac: Large, attractive fruit of good flavor. Plant is susceptible to drought.

Midway: This midseason cultivar is vigorous, very productive, and resistant to the common races of red stele. Berries are deep red, glossy, and very good in flavor. Berry size is medium to large, but has been variable.

Vesper: Is very late, ripening two to three days after Jerseybelle. Berries are very large and attractive, moderately firm, and good in flavor. Dark berries may be soft. Productive, but susceptible to red stele.

Correction

Attention has been called by R. M. Brooks and J. C. McDaniel to errors in the names of oriental persimmons described on page 11 of Vol. 19, No. 1 of F.V.H.D. The first clone should be 'Hachiya,' the fourth should be 'Tanenashi'; and the name 'Maru,' which means round, refers to a group of clones rather than to a specific one.