

The Lafayette Nectarine

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Virginia Polytechnic Institute has recently released a new variety of nectarine developed by plant breeders of the Department of Horticulture. Formerly identified as V.P.I. 52 N, is has been named Lafayette.

The parents of Lafayette are two unnamed V.P.I. nectarine selections, V.P.I. 22 N and 41 N. V.P.I. 22 N, is a white-fleshed nectarine developed from Muir's Seedling, a nectarine variety developed in New Zealand and introduced to the United States more than forty years ago. V.P.I. 41 N was developed by crossing New Boy nectarine, also introduced from New Zealand more than fifty years ago, with the Golden Jubilee peach, followed by three generations of selfing and sib-crossing. The cross that gave Lafayette was made in 1952.

The original tree first bore fruit in 1955, a year in which a series of blossoming season frosts and freezes destroyed most of the peach and nectarine crop in Virginia, except for a few counties in the northern part of the state. The crop was destroyed also on most commercial varieties under test in the V.P.I. orchards. The original seedling tree of Lafayette bore a full crop of attractive fruit even though it was growing in a frost susceptible area of the orchard. The size of the fruit was well above average, and its exceptional color and finish led to the propagating of a few trees for further testing. The selection number V.P.I. 52 N was assigned in 1957. The original tree demonstrated frost tolerance by bearing full crops of fruit regularly until 1963, when winter freezes destroyed all fruit buds in the V.P.I. peach and nectarine orchards.

The fruit of Lafayette ripens at Blacksburg about ten days before El-

berta or three days before the Cavalier nectarine. The tree is of average vigor for nectarines. It is a heavy producer of fruit buds. The flowers are of the large, pink, showy type, and are self fruitful. Representative fruits have averaged 2¼ inches in diameter. The skin color is nearly solid bright red over ivory ground color, with smooth finish, giving exceptionally attractive appearance to the fruits. The flesh color is white with attractive pink adjacent to the pit cavity. The flesh is of above average firmness for a nectarine and has good texture. The flavor is mild, and the quality is good. The fruit are fully freestone. As with the other nectarines of V.P.I. origin, controlling brown rot infection on the fruit has not been difficult nor presented any problems.

The lack of interest in white fleshed peaches, and to a lesser extent in white flesh nectarines, in America, led to the question of the desirability of introducing another variety having white flesh. A group of visiting horticulturists and nurserymen from France saw the original tree of V.P.I. 52 N with a full crop of fruit in 1959. They were impressed with its appearance, quality and performance and requested scions of it so that the selection might be tested in France. It performed well in several locations in France, and requests were made that the variety be released for commercial propagation in France. Its performance at Blacksburg and Winchester, Virginia indicated that it is a white-fleshed nectarine of merit. It has been given the name Lafayette to honor a citizen of France whose friendship with the American colonies, and with Virginia in particular, helped to establish our nation.

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