

# Identify Apples And Other Fruit Varieties

LEESPORT (Berks Co.) — One of the most common occurrences in Pennsylvania is when an owner moves into a new house or farm and discovers the previous owner was a hobbyist tree fruit grower. The new owner is immediately interested in trying to learn what the fruit varieties are named. The new owner makes a trip to the local county extension office with a specimen of the fruit and asks the county staff the variety name of the fruit. Most county offices can tell the difference between the tree fruits. The problem is they cannot often give the variety name. If they are lucky, they can send it to the land grant institution (in our case Penn State University) to see if they can identify the variety. The problem is there are more than 6,000 named apple varieties, 3,000 peach varieties and an equal number of pear, cherry and plum varieties. Compounding this problem is all fruits can be propagated by seed resulting in offspring that most often does not look anything like the parents. This is analogous to that which occurs with human beings; children do not look exactly like their parents.

There are no keys to unlock the answer. Remember, there is no known taxonomic key for fruit. We can get as far as knowing the

difference between apples, pears, peaches, etc., but nothing keys out varieties based on fruit characteristics. Most identifications are done by looking at pictures or reading descriptions out of the old textbooks, which is extremely time consuming. One of the most common series of books utilized to help in identifying old apples is a series produced by the New York Experiment Station. Back in the early 1900s, they published a series called *The Fruits of New York*. These were separate volumes on apples, pears, peaches, cherries, plums, and small fruits. Each subject-book contained detailed descriptions of the many fruit cultivars of the time as well as colored plates of many of the fruit. These books are now collectors' items but you may still be able to locate copies in the larger university or college libraries. You may also find older tree fruit textbooks in old book stores that may contain pictures and descriptions of fruit varieties. Another recent book for apple varieties published in England is *The Apple Book* by Rosanne Sanders. Pomona Book Exchange is a company that specializes in finding old rare

horticultural textbooks and may have copies of some of these books. Their address is: 953 Highway, 552, Rockton PO, Ontario, LOR IXO, Canada, or call (519) 621-8897.

One final source of information when trying to identify old fruit cultivars are three nurseries that specialize in propagating antique or classic fruit varieties. Each has their own catalog that lists descriptions of some of the older fruit varieties. Their addresses are listed below:

Bear Creek Nursery, PO Box 411, Northport WA 99157.

Lawson's Nursery, Rt. 1 Box 294, Ball Ground, GA 30107.

Southmeadow Fruit Gardens, Lakeside MI 49116.

The following are meant to be tips in collecting fruit samples before sending them to someone to attempt to identify.

1. *One fruit does not make a sample!*

No two apples or other fruit on a tree will look exactly the same. Many times the difference between two varieties is so small that it may not be readily apparent on all fruit. To have a chance of success you need a minimum of five

to six apples or specimens of good fruit.

2. *Collect fruit in good condition.*

Many of the samples received for identifications are so covered with disease damage and insect stings that it is impossible to even tell what color the fruit is. Fruit shape and form are one of the identifying characteristics between varieties. Size is also important. If the tree you collect the sample from is overloaded with fruit, then the natural size of the variety is masked. It is nearly impossible to identify misshapen fruit or specimens covered with diseases. Fruit from a neglected tree or one not properly cared for is impossible to identify until healthy-looking fruit is produced.

At the same time, do not polish the fruit, especially apples and

plums. Both fruit can exhibit a waxy covering called bloom that is used in determining the variety. In peaches, the amount of fuzz on the fruit can help eliminate some varieties.

3. *Act like Sherlock Holmes.*

Provide as much information about the tree from which the fruit was picked. How old is the tree? Did they order the tree from a nursery and, if so, which one? Is the tree growing along an old fence row? (Most trees growing there or close to a country road are chance seedlings with no name.) When does the fruit ripen? (Time of ripening can help narrow down the choices.) Do you have any idea what variety the fruit is? (It is a lot easier to rule out a known variety than to start from scratch.)

-Robert M. Crassweller, PSU Associate Professor, Horticulture

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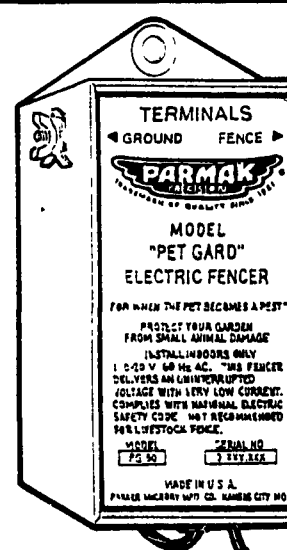
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