

## A TALK ABOUT PERSIMMONS.

### Valuable Facts About the Fruit.

While in this country the apple is justly called the "king of fruits" and the strawberry the "queen of berries," there are many other fruits, as grapes, peaches, pears, etc., that deserve to receive much attention. But another class seems much lower in the public estimation and notice of the members of this class is seldom seen in any of our horticultural journals. In this class I place the native persimmon, mulberry and papaw. All are valuable in their place, and deserve more attention. For the past few years I have endeavored to gather in the most promising named and unnamed varieties of these fruits, so that they might be fruited side by side and a fair estimate made of their comparative worth. Although I have 30 or 40 varieties gathered in I think quite likely that there are still better fish in the deep sea outside, and that my labors are only just begun, yet some things have been learned, and I give in THE R. N.-Y. a few of the ups and downs of the persimmon inquiry.

The late genial, enthusiastic, untiring and much-missed Samuel Miller, of Bluffton, Mo., was a pioneer in this work and has done as much as anyone in searching out the best varieties, bringing them before the public and popularizing the fruit. One of the varieties which he discovered was sent to T. V. Munson, the grape hybridizer of Texas, who has made the variety (Honey) the basis of future experiment, and has even crossed it with one of the Japanese type, with the result that we now have a persimmon that is hardy and yet much larger than any now known native variety. This, Mr. Munson calls the Kawakami, named after one of Mr. Munson's Japanese friends. Why I say "hardy" is because the tree has endured 20 degrees below zero without injury here; how much more it can stand I do not yet know.

Honey itself is a persimmon of the highest quality, large, often larger than a silver dollar, oblate and quite productive. It has some drawbacks; the color is a watery yellow and the fruit must be picked a little before maturity, else it parts from the calyx. The season is long; a few usually ripen before frost, while many mature fully a month later. When the astringency has passed away it becomes soft and separates easily from the calyx, and has a flavor that fully justifies its name. The Josephine, sent out by Judge Miller, is so nearly like it in both tree and fruit that it is possible they may be found to be synonymous.

Silkyfine is one of the many seedlings of the Honey raised by Mr. Munson, who considers it as having even higher quality than its parent. Those first ripening here justified his opinion, but the later ones lacked in the very fine flavor that distinguished the first to mature and I conclude that a warmer climate than this is needed to show the Silkyfine at its best. It is of only medium size, not attractive in color, shrivels on the tree, but is very productive so far, and will be probably fine for home use farther south. Callaway, a medium-sized Illinois variety, which was nearly seedless where it originated in Morgan County, has plenty of seed when planted with other kinds, and has no special value, while a small variety from Kentucky continues nearly seedless under all circumstances. Stout, from W. C. Stout, of Indiana, has the beautiful rich-looking reddish yellow or orange yellow flesh that I have seen nowhere else, except in the case of Saxe, which is a favorite with Prof. Hays, former pomologist. Stout is most beautifully blushed and of fair size and quality. Saxe is large or about 1½ inch in diameter and very showy inside and out. This variety I am judging only from specimens sent, as it has not fruited here. Date seems a popular name for persimmons which cure and dry readily without rotting. I have lately received specimens of one of that name from Indiana that resembles in flesh color a fine mammoth raisin. There is one of that name in Virginia, and Missouri furnishes a late one that really resembles a date in flavor. Indiana seems the home of the persimmon and papaw, and I think that fully one-fourth of the named varieties hail from the Hoosier State, Missouri, Kentucky, Illinois, Ohio and Virginia also furnishing a fair quota.

Kansas is a fair-sized oblate persimmon of good color and fair quality that is firm enough to handle well. Golden Gem, an Indiana product, is said to be planted considerably in that State for market. It is not large, but very productive and of good quality; there are but few seeds and the fruit keeps remarkably well. This is partly owing to the fact that the flesh is not of a mushy texture, or as we would say with grapes, with but little free juice. This is very important to the commercial grower, who cannot afford to plant of a

variety that flattens out to a misshapen mass when it falls from the tree, nor can he afford to plant of a variety that owes its firmness to an overabundance of seeds, for this is a heavy pull-back on quality. Apple Seed is a diminutive variety from Indiana that has no merit except as a curiosity, the seeds being of about the size and shape of a large apple seed. The seed seems to be a distinguishing mark in persimmons and is remarkably constant in each variety as grown here, both as to shape and color. Daniel Boone and St. Thomas are old varieties of no especial merit. The former is of fair size, rounded-oblate in shape, dullish yellow in color; seeds large and quality only moderate. The latter is only of medium size, oval to oblong-pointed, color light yellow, quality average. Big, from eastern Illinois, from B. O. Curtis and reported to him as "big as a Jenning apple," turned out with me much reduced in size and apparently of no great value. Everything considered, the Early Golden is the best of the early ones. Half the crop is ready for market before most of the other varieties ripen. It is of fair size, fine yellow color with often a red blush, dry and firm, yet of very good quality, and may be shaken from the tree on the ordinary leaf-carpet without bruising, and keeps well for an early kind. The tree is a vigorous spreading grower, with a very large thick leaf, and is one of the most productive varieties I have yet seen. Of course this variety supplies only one season, and the season too in which vinegar gnats work for the destruction of all fruits with a never-slacking energy, so varieties that ripen later may have a much greater general value.

Kawakami before mentioned, is late, but just how late I will not venture to guess from the few specimens grown this year. Burt's Date, as sent me fresh from the tree during the holidays two years ago, seemed quite promising for a late kind for home use, but the color was dark, like maple sugar, besides, here on first fruiting the fruit has not yet come up to expectations in size, quality and lateness. When the best varieties existing are finally sorted out and when the probable improvements by hybridizing are well on toward completion I see no reason why the persimmon may not be as popular at least as the native plum. This is not great praise. Although a native here fully half of the people have never tasted a persimmon. Some consider it as among the best of fruits; many only tolerate it; a few can only remember the puckeriness of the unripe ones.

Some nurserymen fail in the propagation of the persimmon, and this is one reason why the grafted trees can scarcely be bought on the market, but I have not found it especially difficult to graft in the Spring before the buds swell. After this success is doubtful. While perhaps the best results are obtained by grafting one and two-year seedlings even with, or a little below the surface of the ground, yet it is practicable to top-graft larger trees, putting in plenty of grafts to insure a properly balanced head and afterward cutting out if necessary. However, I have always tightly wrapped the cleft with waxed cotton yarn or cloth and covered all the cut parts with hot wax applied with a small brush, cutting the string as in peach budding before strangulation takes place. Seed for raising stock for grafting may be treated the same as peach, but often many of the seedlings will be too small to graft until the second Spring. As to transplanting, the trees should not be large, and from 18 inches to two feet of the roots should be saved. If this is done and the trees are planted early in the Spring in very deep holes with the soil well firmed around the root (there is often only one straight root), most of the trees will live. Some propagate by budding, but I consider grafting the better method. No borers injure the trees here. May beetles often prune the foliage badly at blooming time, to the injury of the crop, and there is a small larva, name to me unknown, that occasionally works beneath the hull, but the persimmon here (tree and fruit) is less damaged by insects than any fruit I know of unless it be the black currant. The native persimmon is reasonably hardy, as hardy as the average apple. In my opinion it is a tree to be headed back something like the peach, but further experiments are necessary on this point.

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