

# HORTICULTURE

## The Georgia Heirloom Apple Collection Grows at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia

Gareth Crosby, Heritage Garden curator

The apple has been a staple in the diets of humans around the world for tens of thousands of years. This widely adaptable fruiting tree originated in the Tien Shan mountains of Kazakhstan millions of years ago, but now spans the globe.



Many small holding farmers would plant seeds and take a gamble that some of them would produce tasty fruit. It was a safe gamble as most of the apples could be used for cider if they could not be eaten fresh. One of the beauties of seedling apples is that root sprouts from

these trees are exact copies of the parent tree, thus tasty cultivars were spread far and wide from homestead to homestead.

Interestingly, in 1801, Thomas Jefferson directed government "Indian agents" to distribute apple tree seeds to the Southern Native American tribes to "encourage them to be more agricultural and less warlike".<sup>2</sup> The native people took up the seeds and planted row upon row to great success. Tragically, during the 1830's the tribes were forcibly removed to Oklahoma, leaving their vast seedling orchards behind. It was in these remaining orchards that many of the best-known Southern apple cultivars were found by interested pomologists and renamed to what they are known as today. We have some of these apples in our collection at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia, including Nickajack.



Thus began golden age of apples in the South – 1840-1900. During this period, many large nurseries in the South became involved with the propagation and sale of hundreds of different apple cultivars. Fruitlands Nursery in Augusta, Georgia, listed over 200 cultivars in its 1861 catalog, most of Southern origin. By 1905, a USDA bulletin by staff pomologist W.H. Ragan listed seventeen thousand different apple names. Many of them were versions of the same name: 'Juniting', 'Juneting', 'Genneting', 'June-Eating' and 'Juneating White' for example, all referred to the same apple cultivar. Even given that nicknames and corrupted names were common, some 14,000 different apple cultivars were present around the turn of the century.

Lee Calhoun's book Old Southern Apples describes some 1,800 different apple varieties that either originated in the South or were widely grown here before 1928. Some of the named trees listed are included in our Georgia Heirloom Apple Collection. This collection includes seventeen cultivars that originated in Georgia. The collection was donated to the State Botanical Garden of Georgia in 2018 by Anthony Cannon for the purposes of continuing his work to propagate and share these old-timey cultivars. Our purpose is to propagate, maintain and spread the genetic material for the Georgia Heirloom Apple Collection. If you are interested in more information about the collection, please contact the Heritage Garden curator Gareth Crosby [gcrosby@uga.edu](mailto:gcrosby@uga.edu).

<sup>2</sup> Old Southern Apples by Calhoun, Creighton Lee, 2010



## Tips and Trick from Curators:

### Katie McCullum — Children's Garden Curator:

We make a solution of about 2 teaspoons of cayenne pepper/1 quart of water that we spray on plants that varmints like to munch on, such as broccoli, Swiss chard, tomatoes and flat leaf kale.

### Sheldon Jones – Seasonal Color Curator:

Dead-head annuals daily to ensure the most bloom time from the planting. Early heat will diminish cool season plants and make them stretch or fade away. Keep the spent blooms removed and light pruning of annuals may ensure a longer grow period. If the weather warms too early, remove the cool season annuals and replace with the summer selections for the year.

Brian Santos – International Garden Curator: I like to do a mid-summer prune and fertilizer application on the Salvia species in the garden. Time this around the middle of July when the plants are starting to look a little spent. Cut about 1/3 of the growth off the plant and remove any thin, scraggly branches. Then, apply the recommended rate of a slow release fertilizer (2-3 month, 12-6-6 blend) and freshen up the mulch. The plants will take about 3 weeks to flush back out. This little bit of work will pay dividends by rejuvenating the plants with fresh foliage and an abundance of flowers until frost.

French Jesuits brought the first apple trees to North America in the late sixteenth century for use in cider making. These apples were small and bitter, but when pressed for their juices and fermented, made an excellent alcoholic beverage. Most colonists grew their own apples and, due to sanitation concerns, they often served a fermented cider at meals instead of water, including a diluted cider for the children.

From the perspective of an early settler, roughly 6 trees per person were needed to feed a large family. Apples were eaten fresh, fried, stewed and baked — made into cider, vinegar and brandy; dried in the sun or in a heated dryhouse; and made into preserves and apple butter. The worst of the fruit was used as livestock feed so nothing was ever wasted.

Even though grafted cultivars of apples were available as the colonists settled in, they were expensive and unavailable to colonists who had moved inland.

### Georgia Heirloom Apple Collection

1. San Jacinto
2. Tenderskin (aka Tenderine)
3. Tarbutton
4. Terry Winter
5. Tanyard Seedling
6. Yates
7. King Solomon
8. Cranberry of North Georgia
9. Parks Pippin
10. Mrs. Bryan
11. Old Fashion Limbertwig (aka Red Limbertwig)
12. Rabun Bald
13. Hackworth
14. Carroll County Pound,
15. Spice of North Georgia
16. Shockley
17. Disharoon



## HEIRLOOM APPLES