

PROSPECTS OF A FRUIT LOVER IN THE "SHORT GRASS" COUNTRY.

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PROSPECTS OF A FRUIT LOVER IN THE SHORT GRASS COUNTRY.

When we look at our broad prairies, with their grazing cattle, our waving wheat fields, with the buzz of the many harvesters, we think the people should be happy; as they are, in a way? But when we look at the six-by-ten garden, full of weeds and empty tin-cans, we wonder why people do not spend less time in raising wheat and cattle and more time in living.

Anywhere in Western Kansas, you may see a farm house, fit for a city dwelling, standing alone on the prairie, with the wheat-field coming to the door-step, and not a tree or a shrub in sight, not even a plum bush to shade the hungry hound or furnish fruit for a few astringent pies for the owner, who takes his fruit in the shape of wormy dried apples or spoiled canned tomatoes, shipped from the factories during the ice age.

It is our purpose in this paper to show how a few of the evils of tin poisoning and everlasting fruit hunger may be overcome.

Irrigation.

One way in particular in which these evils may be eradicated and the prospects for fruit increased is thru the channels of irrigation. This may be carried on by any system the farmer or fruit grower desires. A ten-foot windmill will, if managed rightly, irrigate two acres. This can only be done by having a reservoir to give head to the water when turned on. There are many forms of windmills, home-made and otherwise, varying in cost from five to seventy five dollars. Where strong winds have full sweep over the prairies the Jumbo mill may be made to do excellent work. In irrigating, the water should be turned on about once a week, and the

ground stirred before it becomes fully dry on top.

Irrigation will do little unless plants are used which are able to stand the sun, wind, and the sudden climatic changes peculiar to our west.

Nearly all plants of Eastern United States will, in time, become so adapted to our uninviting soil and climate as to thrive readily. This is shown by the fact that the western limit of clover is much further west now than it was a few years ago. Trees and shrubs, never before native to that region, are springing up along the rivers of Western Kansas. I have seen the Wahoo growing in the woods in the west central part of Kansas where it was never known until within the last ten years.

The above would seem to show that we should raise our own fruit trees, and this is exactly the fact of the case. Every farmer and fruit lover should know enough about budding to propagate his own Elbertas; enough about grafting to keep his orchard full. And even tho he cannot do his own grafting, he can obtain his trees from some reliable nursery having a climate the nearest exactly like his own. And he should be sure he is receiving trees grown under existing conditions, not trees shipped from some eastern or southern nursery, and then reshipped as native grown trees to him.

In many parts of western Kansas budded peach trees and perhaps grafted apple trees will not thrive. In this case, seedlings are good resorts. Seedling peaches are easily grown, and a good seedling once found may be easily propagated by budding. A seedling apple might be found in the same way, which will stand our western climate, and afterward propagated by budding or grafting, tho in most cases we cannot afford to wait five to ten years and then find our seedling worthless. The only way to

Overcome this difficulty is to study reports from localities with a climate like our own, then choose from the varieties reported.

A few varieties of different kinds of fruit trees will be here given.

Apples.

Missouri Pippin, a winter apple hardy east of Russell County.

Ben Davis, Winter. Said to be hardy everywhere.

Rawles Janette: Winter. Hardy; under reverse conditions raises many small apples.

Keswick Codlin. Summer apple: very hardy and a sure bearer.

Cooper's Early White. Fall. Said to be hardy.

Peaches.

Elberta has been recommended, tho in our opinion the selection from seedlings is the only way to get hardy and sure bearing trees.

Plums.

Golden beauty is a very hardy tree for dry climates, yet it is not superior to the sand plum and some of the Americanas; and these alone may be depended upon.

Native Fruits.

The prospect for fruit in the west does not depend so much on varieties tested or on selections made from varieties introduced as upon the proper selection of native fruits. And it is our purpose here to take up some of the native fruits that should be developed for the sake of the farmer in the short grass country.

We know that our fruits, at present in cultivation, are either the results of hundreds of years of selection, as in case of the apple, or,

in some cases, the development has been within the time of men now living, as in the grape. Bull and the Concord grape will live forever in horticulture. The Concord first fruited in 1849, and now the market welcomes seedling varieties of the Concord by the score. Here, then, is a case of work done in fifty years, on a fruit not as good to the taste as the worst sand plum of the Arkansas bottoms. Our plums, raspberries and blackberries are of very recent introduction, and have as a general rule been developed in the East, and are peculiar to that region. Why may not the West have its own peculiar horticulture?

Let us enumerate the fruits native to Kansas and those hardy to its climate, which might by selection and propagation be improved to a very great extent.

Plums:--Prunus Chicasa. P. Americana. P. Watsonii.

Cherries:--Prunus Virginiana. P. Besseyi.

Currants:-- Ribes Aurem.

Elderberry:-- Sambucus Canadensis.

Juneberry:--(Dwarf). Amelanchier Batryapiun.

Mulberry:-- Marus Alba & M. ~~Bultra~~^{rubra}.

The above list alone, if propagated and selected properly, would furnish the Westerner with fruit the year around; and it should be the avowed duty of every short-grass fruit lover to select, cross and select, and his prayer should ever be for the day when pork and sorghum are not the only fruits to grace the table of the short grass man.

The American wild plum, Prunus Americana, is described by old naturalists as follows:

Bush 12 - 15 feet high -- spreading stiff branches. Leaf oblong, acute pointed, sharply sawed on edge, much veined, flowers borne on thick short spines appearing before the leaves. Fruit yellow to red, 1/2 to 1 inch in diameter. From Maine to Mexico and west to the mountains.

This species has furnished us with most of our cultivated varieties, and by proper selection from thickets, may furnish varieties for every set of conditions peculiar to Kansas.

The Chickasaw plum.

P. (Chicasa) Augustifolia. Smaller than *Americana*. Shrubby, stiff, smooth, lanceolate leaves. Smaller and narrower than *Americana*. Color the same on both sides. Flowers very thick. Fruit, oval or egg-shaped, skin thin--pulp, soft and sweet. Varieties of crimson and yellow are found in the wild state. This species is in most of wild varieties of a better flavor and far less astringent than the *Americana*. It grows wild over the Western half of Kansas, and is subject to a great deal of improvement in a very short time by selecting pits from the thicket and selecting again. Several well known varieties have already been introduced, of which the Robinson and Pottawattomie are examples.

The third species, the dwarfest, most luscious and the most stubborn of all, the sand plum, *Prunus Watsoni*, is described by Waugh as follows: "The essential difference between the Chicasa and the Watsoni is in height, the Watsoni seldom attaining the height of a man's head. It is usually not more than three to five feet high. The dwarfish appearance is intensified by the short, pointed, often sharply zig-zagging of the twigs, which give an effect of thorniness. These twigs are apt to be ashy gray at two or three years of age. Leaves, smaller than Chicasa and more finely

crenate at margins, but offer no safe distinctive characters. *P. Augustifolia* is said to have its Calyxlobes glandular-ciliate and *P. Watsoni* Epiglandular-ciliate." The foregoing, tho well given, shows how hard it is to describe the sand plum by any constant distinctive characters. Specimens of each have been found in which one or more characters blend into the other. Yet one acquainted with both would not mistake them in the thickets, even if growing side by side. The sand plums are rather limited in distribution, being found along the Republic and Arkansas rivers, and less frequently along the Smoky and Saline, and their tributaries.

Before orchards were planted, people along the Arkansas and other rivers flocked to these thickets, for miles back into the country to gather the fruit. Some of the plants were taken home and planted, but under cultivation they showed less of their good qualities than was hoped for by the ambitious horticulturist, as it did not hold its own under the best of care. It does not take kindly to cultivation and almost always refuses to be improved.

Assistant Dickens says, "After twenty years experience in trying to improve the sand plum, I find myself lóttle farther on the road than when I began." Others have had more success in a few cases, tho no one has been entirely successful. A few varieties have been put on the market. The Bluemont, introduced by E. Gale of Manhattan, Kansas, in the sixties (Vt. Exp. Sta. Bul. 53, 1896), Purple Panhandle, Red Panhandle, Yellow Panhandle and Strawberry are varieties intorduced from the southwest. The Bluemont is said to be an excellent canning variety.

We believe this plum subject to great improvement wherever a loose subsoil can be found, as it does not take kindly to stiff soils. It takes

patience and constant selection to improve or even to keep this plum to its native excellence when it is put under cultivation; yet we hope to see it, in a very few years, in every fruit lover's garden in the short grass region.

The Cherries.

The possibilities for the cherries are very promising to the western horticulturist. Two ~~varieties~~^{Species} grow in the western region; *Prunus Besseyi* and *Prunus Virginiana*.

The Choke Cherry, *Prunus Virginiana*, grows wild along most of the western Kansas streams, and may, perhaps, be improved, tho it is more than highly improbable as it has too much of the astringent to it. Attempts at improvement usually meet with failures. Professor Craig says that in the Province of Quebec, on the clay flats, the French cultivate the Choke Cherry in their gardens, and usually in the tree form. The fruit is large, dark, and in some cases is non astringent; is used as a sauce but more usually is eaten from the hand.

Prunus Besseyi: the Dwarf Western Cherry. Grows all over Western Kansas, on the rocky hillsides and railroad embankments, is from six inches to three feet high. Leaves one-half to one inch long, are spatulate or elliptical; wedge shaped, narrowing at the base, finely veined, of the same color on both sides. Flowers borne in clusters in axis of leaves, are small, looking much like a very small plum blossom. Fruit red to yellow, varies in size from choke cherry to Early Richmond, lasts four to six weeks. All the fruit on one bush ripening at one time, and may be gathered at one picking. The full value of the cherry has not yet been realized, tho some work has been done in the last ten years. The Iowa

Station tested it for stocks for other stone fruits, and found it of value in dwarfing the Japanese plums. This dwarfing caused them to bear earlier and more in proportion to the size of the plant.

The Dwarf Juneberry (*Amalanchier Batryapim*). This fruit grows wild over a considerable part of America, Tho the wild species of the West, *A. Alinfolia* is peculiar to the West, it is no more hardy, and bears less desirable fruit. The *A. Botryapim* is described by Baily as follows: "A bush or small tree, leaves and flower stalks whitish, woolly, when young, often nearly or quite glabrous when old. Leaves, oblong, broadly elliptical, often pointed at base. Flowers in dense racemes." The fruit is juicy and of a fair flavor, purplish red to blue black of the size of a cherry. "Somewhat resembles New England huckleberry." Ripens June 10th, lasts until July 4th. The bush takes very kindly to all kinds of climate and soil. It is said to enjoy rain and hot winds equally well, and freezing does not injure the prospects of fruit.

Thus far the "Success" introduced by Van Deman of Kansas, is the best known and perhaps the only variety on the market. Other varieties may be worked out. But if no such development is made it is a very desirable fruit to have in our gardens.

The Missouri Currant, *Ribes Aureum*, is a shrub-like plant, three to six feet high, with three-lobed leaves. Flowers, tubular in short loose racemes, yellow, fragrant, calyx much larger than limb.

The Crandall seems to be the only variety introduced for general cultivation. It is said to be too variable to be depended upon. "This comes from the distribution of any aureum for the true Crandall, which will not vary in bud propagation." If this were true it would be gratifying to those who wish to work out new varieties and improve the fruit.

The currant in the wild state has decided merits. It is to most people a palatable fruit; even more so than some of our cultivated varieties of the red currant (*Ribes rubrum*), tho to some people it has a taste far ~~more~~^{from} pleasant. It makes a fine sauce, and has greater merits in spiced fruits.

The plant is perfectly hardy and has only one serious drawback--- its spreading habit. This may, in a certain degree be prevented by proper pruning, and by the propagation of ~~the~~ few stemmed forms, so as to give little more trouble than other fruits propagated in the same way. The prospects for this fruit are far better than were those of the grapes fifty years ago.

The Mulberries.

The nomenclature of the mulberries is so variable that only two distinct species will be here taken up: the Russian mulberry (*Morus Alba*) and the native form (*Morus Rubra*).

The Russian mulberry was probably introduced into the West by the Menonites who settled in Nebraska some years ago. It is described by Professor Green in "Forestry of Minnesota," as follows: "Leaves thin, smooth, glabrous, heart shaped, ovate or orbicular. Either lobed or entire. The same plant may bear leaves of different forms. Flowers appear with leaves, are dioecious or monoecious, rarely polygamous. Fruit aggregate, white, purplish or black in color, ripening in July. Usually a low growing tree with a very bushy top, light green bark and spreading branches."

Only a few varieties have been sufficiently improved to put on the market; yet the tree is hardy under all conditions, and fruits every year,

the fruit varying in size and sweetness. The most of the fruits require some acid to make them palatable.

The native mulberry, *Morus Rubra*, is described as a tall, upright tree of from fifteen to sixty feet. Leaves ovate orbicular, acute or taper pointed, occasionally deeply lobed, glabrous above and persistently pubescent below. Flowers appear with leaves. Fruit, dark red to a bright purple, one-half to one inch long, when fully ripe, has a pleasant subacid flavor.

The tree is native over the state to the West Central part and bears more sparingly of fruit than the Russian type, tho the fruit is of a better flavor. A few varieties have been introduced and cultivated, and much may yet be done.

The mulberry is as much a neglected fruit as our wild currant. The silkworm craze sickened all horticulturists of the mulberry as a fruit. The last few years has seen a turn of affairs, and the Russian mulberry has been planted without discrimination. It is grown from seeds without the least selection, so that nothing but an inferior fruit has come from the great number of trees scattered over the West. When a variation toward the better is found, ^{pains have been taken to} no₁ propagate it. It easily grows from cuttings or may be propagated by buds. Its great variability makes it possible to greatly improve the fruit by seed selection. In developing this fruit, two things are to be looked at by our short grass brother: size and acidity. The fact of its long ripening period makes it one of the most valuable of fruits for our Western country.

To-day all the fruits of America are either of American origin or have been bred up to our conditions. The apples, early brought to this

country by the colonists, were less fruitful than the seedlings from those apples.

The Yankee farmer "Goes West," takes along his Rhode Island Greening or Pennsylvania Red Streak; or the "Fruit tree agent" comes along ~~with~~ with his well committed story, telling of things of which he himself knows nothing or little. Our farmers buy; naturally become disheartened. Then they say they will never plant another tree.

What the short grass region needs is more men with the art of horticulture in their minds and souls. Let them work on the fruits given them by nature. Professor Budd has said that all stone fruits of the West must be developed from native forms. And what is true of stone fruits is, to a great extent, true of all others. Every fruit of any land must be peculiar to its conditions. Our West has a fair collection of native fruits that might be worked up in a much shorter time than most of the cultivated fruits of the East have been. In all our garden fruits few cases can be found where the horticulturist has had as much to begin with as the buffalo currant. Our cultivated plums were originated from a stock of less value as a fruit than our sand plum, or sand cherry. The ~~Labrusca~~ grapes are not as palatable as the mulberry, neither are they as large. The Dwarf June-berry is far ahead of of the wild forms of most fruits in cultivation.

If we are to enjoy our Western homes, more attention must be paid to our gardens and orchards. Some of our people have lived on salt meats and smoking tobacco so long they have lost all their love for the beautiful in nature, and have steeled their tastes against the fruits of their boyhood days. But the hour of reckoning is at hand, when all this will

be changed, and our Western farmer will in a few years proudly take his eastern brother thru his garden and with pride will show him his tall mulberries and dwarf cherries; his row of June-berries and that beautiful clump of currants, bred up by his own hand. And then we may even hope to see the fruit of our prickly pear cactus growing the size of pineapples, and furnishing the East with a most luscious fruit.

When these things are realized, our short grass homes will be brighter, our people happier, the stoic indifference will give way to overflowing good nature, and our Western land will truly blossom like a garden.

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