1-1-1962

Better peach varieties

Frank Melville
New peach varieties now under test could help satisfy the consumers' demand for a better range of high quality eating peaches—and expand the market for peaches in Western Australia.

By F. MELVILLE, B.Sc. (Agric.), Senior Adviser, Horticulture Division

THE PEACH is a very versatile fruit and a universal favourite. It is surprising then that the area of peaches in this State is very little different today to what it was 15 years ago. This is in spite of the fact that the population has increased by 48 per cent.

Perhaps a part answer is to be found in the type and quality of peach being offered to the consumer.

There is no doubt that a very fine type of peach can be grown here. The better varieties of peaches marketed by a few specialist growers are evidence of this. But by and large, varieties are in need of revision and more attention is required in marketing attractive fruit at the ideal stage of maturity.

Present Varieties

The present picture is this: We have the early varieties of the Dunhelm type which serve a very useful purpose on the early market, followed by Spinks, which is quite a good peach in the pre-Christmas period. However, follow-up varieties such as Triumph and Ruby Red leave much to be desired. Wiggins lacks colour and Rowe's Slip is no longer popular.

The first of the real yellow fleshed peaches is the Halehaven, ripening before mid January. This J. H. Hale cross was introduced some years ago and has proved very satisfactory in all respects and could be more widely grown.

The Blackburn, ripening a little later, and the Elberta are widely grown and are
the main varieties towards the end of the season. Westralian Beauty is a good late variety at the end of the Elberta season but is a cling stone.

Several years ago two peach varieties, Veteran and Valiant, were introduced from Tasmania. Both are yellow fleshed freestones with excellent eating quality and appearance. However, the few growers who have tried them have not been entirely satisfied because they have a tendency to bruise easily. They are also very prone to attack from birds and have rather high chilling requirements.

**Just what are we looking for in a peach?**

The grower, of course, wants varieties which grow and crop well but not excessively, have ability to produce good sized fruit, cover a wide range of the season and individually have a reasonable handling period. In addition the fruit should not be over-susceptible to bruising or soften too quickly.

From the consumer's point of view the peach should be attractive, juicy and well flavoured. There is also a distinct preference for yellow fleshed free stone types.

The Halehaven meets most of these requirements and is very popular, but others are needed to give a reasonable seasonal spread.

Introducing varieties from outside the State is, however, not always successful, as instanced by Anzac and Briggs Red May, both of which find insufficient chilling here. Apart from other desirable characteristics a peach must be adaptable to our mild winter climate if it is to succeed.

Fortunately, breeding of peaches is much more rewarding in terms of new varieties than other fruits, and a large number have been developed, particularly in America. Apart from general quality characteristics these present a wide range in ripening, and also many have been selected for their tolerance of mild winter conditions. This is particularly important in the northern fruit areas and on the coastal plain.

**New American Varieties**

Three new American varieties were imported in 1958 and are at present under test. These are Starking Delicious, which ripens about Christmas, Southland, which comes in just before mid January (and unfortunately clashes with Halehaven) and July Elberta, which is just a little later. All are yellow fleshed but not completely freestone. Starking Delicious is likely to be very useful because of its earliness.

Three more American peaches were imported last summer. One—Red Haven—is a Halehaven hybrid stated to ripen six weeks ahead of Elberta, which could bring it well forward into December. Further varieties are also now going through quarantine in New South Wales and when released will be tried here. Some very early yellow fleshed types ripening as early as any peach grown here at present are included in this group.

Altogether the new introductions include some very interesting types and it is hoped that when they have been finally tested they will provide some welcome additions to our present range of peaches. The fact that many are Halehaven crosses augurs well for their adaptability to local conditions.

Although choice of the right varieties is of paramount importance, good growing and marketing are equally essential if full benefit is to be obtained.

The successful fruit grower is the one who specialises, and this certainly applies to peaches. Efforts to market high quality bruise free fruit are proving well worthwhile. In the United States, coloured paper trays and cups are being extensively used to add to the appearance of the peaches and prevent damage. Open trays have been used successfully here for some years for marketing forward fruit.

If a well grown high quality peach can be delivered to the consumer at the right stage of ripeness, there is little doubt that he will come back for more. Better varieties could bring this about.