

Fruits I Have Known

This story is a personal history of my involvement with fruits and related items. When I was 5 years old, my mother noted that I liked anything orange, especially orange juice. As I became older, I selected my own clothing and most of it became orange over time. I did go to college at Caltech, where the school colors were orange and white, so I wore those colors to most reunion activities at that school. As a freshman there, I worked with Linus Pauling's group on developing safe anesthesia agents for brine shrimp and, as it turned out, humans. He later published the controversial "Vitamin C and the Common Cold". I have consumed large quantities of fruits that have Vitamin C over time, and have not had any indications of the common cold, even though I have not gotten the flu shot each year. There are 30 fruit trees planted around my house to provide fresh fruit year around.

Valencia Orange – When I was growing up in North Hollywood, the south facing windows of my room looked at a Valencia Orange tree. Behind it was a Eureka Lemon tree. Many houses in the San Fernando Valley had those two trees in the yard. In 1980, I was looking for a place with acreage to build a house in Southern California. I found several places for sale that had oranges or lemons planted along with electric and water service. I purchased a Valencia orange grove and joined Sunkist Growers. Most years, I produce over one million oranges from the grove which are marketed by Sunkist. I have an electric juice squeezer and have fresh orange juice from May to September.

Tangelo – A cross between a tangerine and a pomelo. The fruit is large, spherical, deep orange and produces a very sweet juice. There are a lot of seeds. It ripens between January and March. I have a nice tree in my yard. Boxes of tangelos are available from the fruit stands near Fillmore.

Satsuma Tangerine – There are many types of mandarin oranges that originated in China. The Owari mandarin (Satsuma) is seedless and generally sold with a few leaves attached. It is easy to peel and sweet in flavor. I planted two of the Satsuma trees in the side yard, but they require full sun all day long to produce good fruit, and some of the other trees have grown tall enough to shade the tangerine, reducing the yield of fruit. My complaint about the other mandarins is the number of seeds in most types. They are also more difficult to peel and separate due to their smaller size.



Sumo Fruit – developed in Japan as the Dekopon Mandarin. It has a bulbous end like a tangelo and peels easily like a tangerine. The sections are separated by a very thin membrane and there are no seeds. The citrus flavor is excellent. Right now, it my favorite orange relative. I get a whole box whenever I can find them, but the cost per fruit is about \$3. I would like to plant the orange grove in this variety, but it is not available yet for commercial planting in the area. Like most mandarins, this fruit becomes ripe from January to March.



Marsh Ruby Grapefruit –My father always preferred the red Frank Lewis grapefruit from Alamo, Texas at the far south end of the Rio Grande Valley. He would get a box by mail every month and eat a grapefruit almost every day. The grapefruit from fruit stands in Borrego Springs are the best in California. I have been going there for fifteen years and I try to pick up about 10 bags to eat, juice, and give to friends. The available season is usually from January to April.

Bearss Lime – when we moved to Calabasas in 1984, there was a Bearss Lime tree in our yard. The fruit looks like a green lime but is used just like a seedless lemon. The tree produces useful fruit the year around with peak production in February. Whenever we need a lemon, we just go out to the tree and get one. I have noticed that that tree is also in the yards of several homes in the area. I wonder if the tract developer considerably placed one in every yard.

Avocado - Zutano, Fuerte, Hass, Pinkerton. These are the four types of avocados that are planted in the grove. There are two sections; in each section there are two Zutano (large light green and oblong, fruit in February) and two Fuerte (dark green with pimply skin, fruit in March) to provide cross-pollination for the Hass trees (hard black skin with creamy inside, fruit in June) where grove is located). I deliberately planted one Pinkerton because I like the larger size and thick black skin, but somehow after 8 years, that tree died. Most stores now carry only Hass avocados due to their excellent flavor and shipping qualities. The market value of other avocado types has almost become non-existent. With groves in various locations along the California coast, the Hass fruit is now mostly available year around and prices vary depending on the season. Since all Hass avocados genetically originated from one orchard tree in La Habra Heights, California, there is a potential for an ecological disaster. Avocados originated in southern Mexico, and there are many kinds of trees in backyard orchards.



Strawberry – Cultivated in many locations and many climates with many varieties. The readily available varieties ship well but lack the deliciousness of the more fragile types. Surprisingly, the ones I had from the farms in Prince Edward Island in Canada rated best in my experience. Oxnard in Ventura County is locally famous for the May Strawberry festival, but there are many strawberry festivals where they are grown. One of my friends from Caltech inherited a strawberry farm operation near Monterey in California and reports that he makes a consistent profit every year from growing strawberries. For many fruit varieties, this is not the case.

Seedless Table Grapes - I have liked the ordinary Thompson seedless green grapes for years, but recently I have found in the grocery store various related looking grapes with more exotic flavors and names to match. These have been developed with research help and several have become available from the local high-end grocery store. They are much larger than the ones I used to get and also come in other colors like red, purple, and black. Many of them are available for planting in the backyards of homes and they can grow rapidly on a trellis to provide both shade and fruit.

Plums and Zaiger Hybrids – Traditionally in Southern California, people who wanted fresh plums planted the yellow flesh Santa Rosa next to the purple flesh Satsuma Plum to provide cross-pollination. There is usually a large crop of fruit in alternate years. This results in a huge “put the fruit in jars” effort every two years at the end of July to conserve fruit as in whole fruit, jam, jelly, and mixtures. In the last 20 years, there have been several related plum varieties (the Zaiger hybrids and related types) which are self-fertile with different colors, flavors, and suggestive names. At the Calabasas Farmer’s Market, one seller from the California Central Valley generally has about 15 types of plum hybrids with names like Apriums, Peacotums, Plumcots, and Pluots. Also, fruits that are readily available from the store are less interesting than those which are difficult to find, or do not ship well. So, I have about 10 varied types of these plum/apricot/peach fruit trees in my yard. I am still hoping for better fruit production. The local squirrels (or is it the birds?) appear to be the major menace. I really liked picking many types of stone fruit from the small farming area of Brentwood, east of San Francisco/Oakland.

Fuyu Persimmon – Chris really likes this variety, so we planted two trees in front along the street. The trees grow slowly and produce very nice fruit. This variety is sweet and not astringent like some varieties. Some persimmon trees were planted by the Franciscans in the courtyards of the California missions, and some are still there. In the 20th century, the very dense reddish persimmon wood was used to make golf clubs (hence the term “wood”, even though those clubs are now usually metal). This fruit originated in central China and spread from there.



Asian Pear – when I visit Bob Sugar, we go to local orchards near Sacramento. They have many types of pears, apples, and other seasonal fruits there. I planted two of the Hosui variety along the street. They grew high and straight up to the TV cable wires and had to be trimmed. They produce prolific numbers of brown fruit in the fall. There are two dwarf Bartlett pears next to them. The yellow round 20th Century Asian Pear is a delicious and juicy choice.



Passion Fruit – This plant originates from South America. It was named by the 16th century Spanish Catholic Missionaries in the Amazon region of Brazil. When I used to work at TRW in Redondo Beach, there were many one-meter-high bushes adjoining the grassy area and the building courtyards. There was this oblong fruit on the bushes, so I went around in September and ate them by cutting them in half and spooning out the pulp. The fruit from stores is mostly wrinkled and lacking that same flavor.



Feijoa or Pineapple Guava - Feijoa is a species of flowering plant from South America highlands along the Tropic of Capricorn. It is planted for the tree and for its fruit. Bob Sugar gave me two trees which are now planted in the front yard slope along with one guava tree of the yellow outside, pink inside variety. That type is used for juice. His dad used to have two older trees along the side of his house in North Hollywood which produced prolific amounts of varied size fruit.



Kiwi – available in green and gold. Grown widely in New Zealand, hence the name developed for marketing purposes. Originally called the Chinese gooseberry, as it was grown in China, but that name does not sell well. Kiwis are one of the most nutrient-dense of all fruits. California with 8000 acres is the only state that commercially produces kiwis. Kiwis were not widely available in California grocery stores until 1970, and kiwis in stores appear more commonly from New Zealand. I almost purchased a kiwi orchard near Moorpark, California, but decided that the vines were too fragile.



Carambola - also known as starfruit, is from a tree native to tropical Southeast Asia. Around 1990, I started seeing it in some baked goods, since the star shape is quite attractive.



Jackfruit – grows off of the trunk of the large tree. I first saw it on the streets of Rio De Janeiro, but it originates from Southeast Asia. The tree is very productive and can produce a large amount of the huge 10 to 25 kilogram fruit, the seeds and the seed coat inside are edible, but it takes effort to separate them from the rest of the white matrix of the fruit. My preference is for the orange seed coat. The odor is considered pleasing.



Durian – nicknamed the "king of fruit," another fruit with origins in southeast Asia. It looks like a 25 cm sphere with projecting stout spines all over it. The ripe fruit is very sweet, but many people find the over-ripe fruit odor to be disgusting. In Singapore hotels and on public transit, there are signs prohibiting the durian. The Musang King variety has attracted many enthusiasts, and large orchards are being planted in Malaysia.



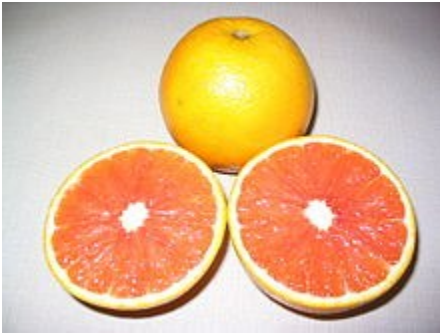
Mangosteen – called the "queen of fruit". A smallish round purple fruit mostly grown in southeast Asia. Due to the Asian fruit fly danger, these fruits were illegal to import into the United States until 2007. They are still difficult to find except in specialty grocery stores. It tends to be paired with the durian in some traditional medicine. The extract from the peels is used as a natural purple dye.



Pineapple – Originally a bromeliad from around the Paraguay River in South America. It was developed and refined by James Dole on the island of Oahu in Hawaii around 1900. The Dole company then developed the island of Lanai for pineapple production and barged the fruit to Oahu for processing and canning. Before closing in 1991, a tour was available of the facility in Honolulu. The original pineapple farm is still in Oahu as a tourist attraction. Most of the world's pineapple production has now moved to other countries with Costa Rica, Philippines, Brazil, and Thailand being the top producers.

Tomato - I do not want to get into the fruit/vegetable discussion, but the tomato does have lots of Vitamin C. I became interested when I saw many white bins of same size, correctly ripe and red tomatoes being trucked up and down Interstate 5 to the processing facilities in the Stockton area. I saw about 40 bins of tomatoes on my road trip and all of them had the same tomato appearance; I did not see any green tomatoes in the bins. I found that the tomato growers were using a type of Early Girl tomato where all the tomatoes ripen at the same time. This makes a crop that can be machine harvested and trucked to the packing factory and then into the jar or the can in hours. I then tried several cans of diced tomatoes and found the flavor to be excellent. Fresh tomatoes on the vine and many more types of tomato-based sauces (like salsa) are now being sold.

Fruits of the Future – Most of the above fruits were not available in the grocery stores 50 years ago (in 1970) because they have been only recently imported into local Los Angeles stores. Other fruits have been developed by variant breeding or discovery in the orchards of the world like the Cara Cara citrus from the Cara Cara plantation in Venezuela. I look forward to the development and discovery of new fruits to sample. However, for some fruits, only one type is in the market. For example, only the Cavendish banana, Hass avocado, and Palmer mango are routinely available. I find that the Asian oriented stores have larger selections of fruits. I look for different kinds of bananas, cherries, mangos, peaches, and pears in season.



At the Luther Burbank home in Santa Rosa, I found the following statement:

If you want to contribute to society, bring into it a new useful plant.