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Tasty Apples, Tasteless Names

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GARDEN NOTES

TASTY APPLES, TASTELESS NAMES

By Dennis Hinkamp

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Have you ever tried a Cathead apple? How about a Hog Pen? And, what kind of a person would grow a Holstein apple?

Hundreds of different apple varieties are grown all over the world says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist.

Why are there so many different apple varieties?

They are the result of crossing when apple trees are pollinated, he explains. Almost all apple trees require cross pollination for the fruit to develop. An example of this is a Red Delicious tree pollinated by a Golden Delicious. Red Delicious apple trees need the pollen from another variety to produce abundant fruit. This is why horticulturists recommend planting a minimum of two different apple trees in a yard.

When a seed from a Red Delicious apple is planted and allowed to grow, the tree it produces will likely be different from its parent, Goodspeed says. In fact, the odds are a million to one that the tree produced will be similar to the parent tree. Chances are better that the tree will produce small, inedible, funny-shaped or just plain ugly apples. However, a few seedling trees end up producing desirable fruit. In fact, this is how most of our present apple varieties originated. A chance seedling was allowed to grow, and the tree just happened to produce desirable fruit.

These desirable fruits that Mother Nature produces are then named and replicated asexually (by budding and grafting buds or wood onto known rootstocks), he says. This guarantees that the new trees are exactly like the parents.

Naming the tree varieties can be fun, and it is interesting to know a little about their origin, Goodspeed says. Granny Smith apples were a chance seedling that grew out of a rubbish pile by Anna Marie Smith's kitchen window. She allowed the tree to grow by her home in New South Wales, Australia. Once the fruit matured, she realized she had a keeper and, of course, the tree was named after her.

Other chance seedlings are also named after the person who discovered them in some field or orchard, he says. McIntosh, Sam Young and Ben Davis are all named after the orchardist who first found them. McIntosh is obviously the most noted. The Mary McKinney was found

growing near her grave and was honored with her name.

Other apple varieties have been named after their location where the tree was found, he adds. A Smokehouse apple tree grew near Mr. William Gibbon's smokehouse in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Hollow Log had the misfortune of growing by a hollow log. By now I guess you can figure out where Hog Pen got its name. Thankfully, it does not describe the flavor. Cathead was named for its distinctive profile. Still other varieties receive their titles because of their shape or aroma. Winter Banana has a faint fragrance of ripe bananas. Pumpkin Sweet is large and slightly pumpkin colored. Chenango Strawberry and Pitmaston Pineapple are apples that look somewhat like their namesake fruits.

"Some apple varieties have interesting names that I can't explain, or I've been unable to uncover the story behind them," Goodspeed says. "Summer Rambo, Hewe's Crab and Hubbardston's Nonesuch, are a few names that fascinate me. So, if by chance you have a seedling tree growing in the yard, don't be afraid to name it after yourself, its shape or even its location."

Do you think an apple called Rusted VW or Compost Pile would sell?

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