

New Jersey News

Planting Apple Trees, A Growers Perspective

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Terhune Orchards, Princeton, New Jersey

Spring is coming, and guess what? Farmers- including this one- are thinking of planting. Each farming year is different- some good and some not so good. Regardless, when February and March come around, farmers begin to think of planting.

I am the 10th generation of my family to farm in this area. My grandfather, William Mount, was, what was then called, a general farmer. He grew several crops which were potatoes, wheat, rye, corn, vegetables, and a few apples. Not as many types as our 45 crops at Terhune today but still enough to cover his marketing opportunities. His farm was on Route 1 in West Windsor; now the lo-

cation of Canal Pointe Condos. The apples he grew were about 5 acres, I think. I saw them when I was a boy, but even so, I remember them as old trees. The names cause today's apple growers to stop and recognize that they are part of a history and a tradition- growing and producing one of nature's great fruits for others to eat. Names such as Ben Davis, Pippen, Greening, Nero, York, Jonathan, Rome Beauty, Paragon, Stayman, Transparent, Delicious. Although most growers today have never seen them, I think they all would know what I was writing about. My father and uncle planted many more trees—about 300 acres total, but I do not forget my grandfather's orchard.

My grandfather bought his trees from Steelman's Nursery located about 4 miles south on Quakerbridge road in Clarksville- the location of today's Mercer Mall. As a boy, I remember Steelman's most for my mother's purchase of strawberries, and asparagus for my brothers and I to eat. Steelman's not only produced those crops but also sold plants to other farmers- strawberry, asparagus, peach trees, and apple trees. Many of the varieties were developed at Rutgers University in New Brunswick and by special arrangement a royalty was paid to farmer organizations such as, New Jersey Apple Institute, New Jersey Small Fruit Council, New Jersey Asparagus Council, and New Jersey Peach Council. When Steelman's ceased business the royalties stopped, but over the years,



the farmer groups have carefully safeguarded the funds and still today use them to support their industries with grants for research and promotion. I am the current treasurer of two of the groups.

New Jersey State Horticulture Society and the NJ Small Fruits Council*

This year, the New Jersey State Horticultural Society awarded 16,000 dollars in apple and peach research grants, and the Small Fruit Council awarded 2500 dollars for a strawberry project. It is a cycle. The funds came from the sale of trees and plants. The research improves the varieties and planting systems which helps the farmers improve their farms. The cycle repeats. I hope you can tell how happy and proud I am to be a part of that tradition.

I have to come back to my story of planting. When my grandfather brought home trees from Steelman, in his horse drawn wagon, there was not, in today's terms, that many trees to plant. 5 acres at 30 trees per acre made for 150 trees. "Setting Out"- was the process of lining up the rows, up and down, left and right, and on the diagonal. I can imagine my grandfather's uncle, Lewis C. Mount, from whom he purchased the farm, as being on hand when he planted, perhaps helping as my uncle Russel Mount did when I planted my first Terhune trees in 1978. I also imagined us planting the same way- with a shovel. Dig the hole, make sure the roots have enough room and backfill with fine, loose soil so there are no air pockets to dry out the roots.

Something I enjoy so much is visiting other orchards and fruit growing areas. There are so many ways to plant apple trees. I got the idea one year to dig the hole with a tractor mounted auger- a lot easier than the shovel. It was not so good for us. The clay loam soil on Cold Soil Road formed a clay pot around the routes, restricting drainage and eliminating root growth. Back to the shovel.

We now use a tractor drawn planter. It opens a trench and packs the soil down afterward, one

row at a time. Our trees are planted 3 feet apart, so the tractor needs to drive slowly. Last month, I visited western New York and saw a farm that used a two-row planter, 24 ft wide. It took a big tractor. I also saw a farm that used a single bottom plow to make furrow down the row. Trees were stood in the furrow and covered with dirt by hand. But not all planting methods use a tractor. 3 years ago, my daughter Reuwai and I visited a 400-acre farm in Washington that had just been planted by hand. That was 1200 trees per acre- 480,000 in all- by hand! Most times trees are planted on a flat, level field, but in areas that might be a little wet the rows are mounded. The tree row is 4-8 inches higher than the middle. Given that "Cold Soil Road" is a euphemism for "wet soil road", we sometimes use this method. The most unusual planting method I have ever seen was on a trip to Poland and Germany. We visited a farmer in the former East Germany who was convinced his soil was no good. It was the only time I have ever seen trees planted without digging a hole first. He stood the tree on the ground and scraped the soil around it up to the trunk to cover the roots. He was puzzled that his trees were not growing well. Being polite guests, we said nothing.

This year, we are replanting about 200 cherry trees that had arrived severely damaged from the nursery last year. Most of them died and the rest grew very little during the year. We are also planting more Crimson Crisp, our new favorite apple. Some will replace a planting of Jonamac, an apple that has never quite caught on. The rest will replace some failed grafts from 3 years ago when we had tried to change over an Enterprise planting to Crimson Crisp. I will try to have my children and grandchildren there when we plant. The cycle will continue.

Reprinted from Terhune Orchard News- Spring 2019 <https://terhuneorchards.com/farm-news/>

*New Jersey State Horticulture Society <http://njshs.org/>



Pruning meeting for commercial growers (February 11, 2019) hosted by Wightman Farms, Morristown, NJ, and sponsored by Win Enterprises International (<http://wincowgill.com>) and Rutgers University. Win Cowgill of Win Enterprises, teaches pruning and training tall spindle apple. Skeeter Kielblock and Adam Costello look on.

Catherine Sorge (Ripple Hill Farm) Passed December 26, 2018

Catherine A. Sorge long time Basking Ridge resident passed away peacefully at home on December 26, 2018. She was the daughter of Frank and Ann Novak. She is survived by her husband Joseph, five children, 14 grandchildren, and 9 siblings. Catherine was co-founder and financial controller of the family environmental firm located in Somerville. Cathy was a long-time member and past president of St. James Rosary Altar Society, the League of Women voters, and numerous other volunteer organizations.

Cathy was the manager of Ripple Hill Farm, a family owned peach and apple farm located in Basking Ridge. Cathy and Joe were long time supporting members of the NJ State Horticulture Society. She was one of the founding members of the Bernards Township Agricultural Committee. Catherine was appointed by the Somerset County Freeholders to the Agricultural Advisory Committee and later appointed to the County Agricultural Board. She was recognized for her unique perspective, strong opinions, and common sense analysis on the Board and was appointed as a delegate for the County to the State Agricultural Convention. Cathy lived life to the fullest, known for her optimism, positive outlook, and desire to provide a helping hand to family, friends, and her community. Cathy was a friend to everyone who had the privilege of knowing her. She will be sorely missed by her family, friends, and the community she served. For further information, or to light an online condolence candle please visit www.gcfuneralhome.com. Cathy requested that in lieu of flowers, please donate in her name to Saint James Church in Basking Ridge.

New Jersey State Horticulture Research Grant Awards in 2019

Precision Chemical Thinning and Tools for Crop-load Management. Win Cowgill (\$3,000).

Management of Bitter Rot and White Rot on Apple. Norm Lalancette (\$3,000).

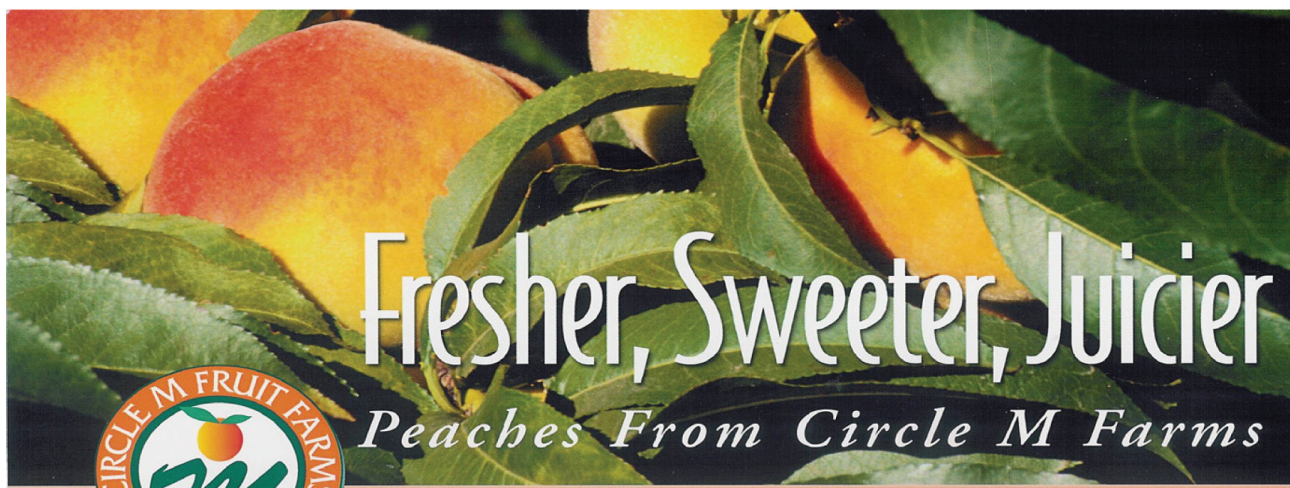
Invasive SWD Management for Diverse Fruit Farms. Dean Polk (\$3,000).

Evaluation of the Impact of Apple Rootstocks on Productivity. Megan Muehlbauer (\$3,446).

Improving Use of Soil Fertility and Leaf Tissue Analysis. Megan Muehlbauer (\$3,432)

International Dwarf Fruit Tree Association. (\$500).

Total Research Support for 2019 from NJSHS \$16,378



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