

Apple Update – 2010-12

The apple trees are growing well and we have not had to apply insecticides for any reason. Growth and form is settling down and we have not seen a repeat of the fire blight infection from 2009.

I need to apologize for the bad comments I have made about 'Hazen' apples. In past years, I have denigrated this apple for becoming soft, brown and mealy if it fell from the tree or was allowed to rest at room temperature for several days before eating. This is still true, but if you watch your fruit very carefully and taste it every couple of days, you will be able to harvest and keep some nice apples if you can chill them immediately. The trees are quite prolific and the apples have nice, dark red skin. If refrigerated right after picking, these apples will store about a month and will be of adequate texture and flavor.

'Hazen' trees are noted to be naturally semi-dwarf but when they were young, they were the fastest growing variety and they got some fire blight. In 2011 and especially 2012, they stopped growing as fast as they had been and you can see the leader naturally taking a turn away from vertical. This is pretty cool! They are really prolific trees and seem to bear fruit every year. I now say that I like them as a steady producer of 'OK' apples.

'Honeycrisp' apples really are as delicious as they are claimed to be. They are not, however, reliable bearers. In orchards, they are known to be biennial bearers (every other year). We have six trees and they have not produced a 'good' crop yet. Every tree has produced apples, but not in a quantity that would make a person happy.

'Haralred', on the other hand, produces so many apples that it imperils its life! Trees planted only 2 or 3 years can be covered in apples. The trees we have are very slow growing and so the only solution is to remove small apples after blossom. I am not happy with our selection of 'Haralred'; the apples need a very long time to ripen and even after several light frosts, they taste very green. If they hang long enough, the fruit gets tough and rubbery, but does not taste any better. Visitors have told me that they grow this variety successfully, so I think our clonal selection or rootstock used on these trees is poor.

'Sweet Sixteen' takes a very long time to produce fruit. A visitor told me her tree was growing nine years and hadn't produced fruit. This variety has very upright growth, to the point that the branches will grow in on themselves, like the shape of a closed tulip. In general, upright branches are very vegetative and are not very fruitful. The only solution is to prune or train for more horizontal growth. It may not be pretty. For an unfruitful tree, my horticulture professor recommended that a branch be weighted down below horizontal so that sugars would accumulate in it during the growing season. This extra energy would induce flower production and once one branch flowered, it would spread to the rest of the tree. I am trying this with my own tree at home.

'Zestar' is our fifth apple variety. We planted four in 2007 and saw the first fruit in 2011. It ripens in August, has very white flesh, is crunchy and has a zesty, sprightly flavor. I would describe it as an excellent, apple-y 'McIntosh'. This variety also has long, upright growth but in a different way than 'Sweet Sixteen' (they appear to be 'spur-type' trees).