

HISTORY OF MANGOS AND OTHER TROPICAL FRUITS IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

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The first mango variety to be introduced directly from India in a tub was brought in by H. E. Van Delman of the United States Department of Agriculture. This was a Mulgoba and it was given to Professor Elbridge Gale who lived on Lake Worth in a community then known as Mangonia. This is now a part of West Palm Beach in the general area of 30th Street.

Dr. David Fairchild, as a boy, had known Professor Gale at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas at the time when Dr. Fairchild's father was president of that school. This early introduction of the Mulgoba was made during the eighties and Doctor David Fairchild visited Professor Gale in 1898 and saw the Mulgoba growing in Professor Gale's garden. It was then the only East Indian mango tree growing in America.

The freeze of 1899 did some damage to the tree but both Dr. Fairchild and Professor Gale were certain that the mango could be successfully grown in South Florida, having survived this disastrous freeze.

In this period Captain Haden of Coconut Grove had heard of the delicious Mulgoba and he sailed up to what is now West Palm Beach in his little boat and returned to Coconut Grove with 12 fruits. He then planted the seeds obtained from Professor Gale and thus from Palm Beach to Dade County one of these seeds developed a fruit that is known far and wide as the Haden Mango. But this story is part of the horticultural history of Dade County, and for much of the mango producing area of South Florida.

About the time of these happenings a Mr. Henry Flagler began his developments in Palm Beach. His interests were in establishing a luxurious winter resort and while he did encourage some other fields of agricultural activities many of the nurseries of the area found the strictly ornamental plants more prosperous than fruits.

Some of our horticulturists of those early years felt that tropical fruits did have a place

in our future economy. One of the earliest of these pioneers was John Bloomfield Beach who had worked as a fertilizer salesman up and down the Florida East Coast. He first established his nursery at Melbourne in 1886 but he found that the area of the present West Palm Beach suffered much less from cold damage so he moved to the shores of Lake Worth in 1894 and established his first nursery about the site of the present West Palm Beach Post Office.

Mr. Beach later moved his nursery and grove to the area of Allendale Road and Omar Road, west of Parker Avenue, in West Palm Beach.

Mr. Beach propagated mangos and avocados extensively and at one time shipped a carload of mangos by express to California. He grew for use in his nursery many varieties of mangos and avocados that are not at all known to commercial producers of recent years. I can remember visiting this nursery with Mr. Beach and being thoroughly confused by variety after variety with all their good and bad characteristics being fully explained by the enthusiastic Mr. Beach.

John Beach was a member of this Horticultural Society for many years and was a contributor to at least ten volumes of our proceedings. Mr. Beach passed on December 10, 1929, one of many individuals who worked for the improvement of Florida's agriculture, ahead of his time.

Following the fruiting of the first Mulgoba, seeds and inarched plants were planted by many individuals. The Garnett Brothers of Hypoluxo planted a small acreage of mangos along what is now U.S. #1 and near Lake Clarke on what is now High Ridge Road. Some of these old trees are still living in this section of the county. The Garnetts also planted citrus groves in both locations mentioned above. Andrew Garnett and his son Irl operated a citrus packing house at the time I came to the county, in 1925, and produced and sold citrus of good size, good quality and good appearance. Irl Garnett and his son are still interested in the mango business.

Continuing south in Boynton Beach, Fred Benson and J. J. Williams operated small

mango groves and like many other farming enterprises the land boom has eliminated about all but yard plantings in the "close in" properties.

In the late twenties James Miner of Boynton Beach became a convert to the mango fruit. He taught himself to bud the plants and acquired property south of Miner Road and west of the Florida East Coast Railroad where he first established the largest grove now producing in Palm Beach County. Mr. Miner had also started developing a grove in the flat woods west of Boynton Road but along came our boom, just mentioned, and that development changed owners.

James Miner still owns his original grove, but believes that urban expansion will eventually take over his entire acreage. Mr. Miner has been an excellent shipper-packer and salesman of mangos and has contributed much to the industry in recent years.

To mention the Zill family seems like a waste of time to a Krome Memorial group. This family has worked with mangos and other tropical fruits for almost four generations. The Julie was named for Laurence Zill's grandmother, the Carrie for his mother and the Zill, I presume, for the whole family; which should take ample care of Laurence and his son.

Laurence Zill started budding young mangos in quantity and has developed a reputation for quality and reliability and has furnished plants to many South Florida nurseries. It is with regret that we hear he is casting his eyes and finances toward Central America. His many friends wish him well wherever he goes. His home exhibits his interest in many fruits other than mangos. There you will find avocados, sapodilla, lychee, sugar apple, cherimoya, sapote, Dovyalis, many good guavas, Barbados cherry, and you name the rest!

In the early thirties Edith Y. Barrus, at that time County Home Demonstration Agent in Palm Beach County, discussed with me the need for more home-grown fruits. We decided the situation needed encouragement and we began to work on the problem. We visited areas where more fruits were grown and brought back seeds of all varieties we could find. We did this in hopes that an increasing quantity of fruits would encourage a desire for more fruits and eventually better quality fruits.

At about this time Mrs. Barrus was transferred to the Tallahassee office as District Home

Demonstration Agent and Miss Olga Kent came to Palm Beach County as Home Demonstration Agent. Miss Kent had been very successful in establishing the Mango Forum in Broward County. The Forum soon began to rotate meetings between Dade, Broward and Palm Beach County. This Forum has done much to locate, test and encourage new seedlings of quality and commercial promise.

In Palm Beach County we have held contests, giving cash awards to the best new seedlings shown. This venture has done much to give home owners a better understanding of good quality fruits and what should be expected in a good yard. An interesting personal observation is the fact that as I ride about the county I can see large trees that came to that property as a seed in my pocket.

In discussing Palm Beach County in Agriculture most persons think of the Everglades, but the Glades has not been kind to most fruits. Avocados put out a very rapid growth when grown on Okeechobee peaty muck known to us as Custard Apple muck, but many acres have succumbed to high water conditions. There is only one grove that has survived over a period of years. This is the property of the Boe brothers of Pahokee. Their land is high Custard Apple and they have the grove well protected by dikes and pump installations. They have planted and are now producing Tonnage, Booth 8, Taylor and Collinson avocados.

Another successful Glades fruit producer is Floyd Erickson of Canal Point. The Erickson family has always been interested in fruits and they have a Mulgoba seedling that must be over forty years old. This tree had never produced fruits until the accidental spraying of the tree caused some set of fruit. Floyd has such well-known varieties as Carrie, Kent, Edwards, Simmons, Haden, Brooks Late and Zill, all producing regularly.

He is increasing his plantings and in addition to mangos he is planting avocados, papayas and some Lychees. Mr. Erickson is convinced that a good spray program to combat Anthracnose and mildew is essential to success in the Glades.

David Sturrock and his son Tom have played a significant part in the tropical fruit picture of Palm Beach County. Imbued with interest and the ability to observe and make sound decisions on plants of all kinds, they have done much to bring these fruits to the attention of

our county. They have lived where it was their fortune to observe these plants almost daily and they have worked in an academic climate and their information was freely extended to all in the early days of the attempts to encourage more plantings. They played their part well.

Other individuals in the Delray Beach area who had attempted mango production were Adolph Hoffman and John J. Schabinger. Both of these men had produced pineapples and Mr. Schabinger was also a vegetable farmer. They had their mango plantings in the areas of their homes and contributed to interest in these fruits by providing information to many of their neighbors.

I would be remiss if I did not mention a one time successful industry in the Eastern part of our County. Pineapples at one time covered many acres of our high sand land near the coast. There were pineapple farms from Boca Raton to Lake Park and from Jupiter to Vero Beach. This was early in the twentieth century and in the late years of the nineteenth century it was a most successful and profitable crop. I would be wrong if I did not venture some reasons for the decline and fall of this once strong crop. Judging from impressions we have observed, it seems apparent that we knew nothing of minor elements and our pineapples needed certain minor elements, especially iron and zinc.

We had inferior methods of controlling insects, especially mealy bugs. Mealy bugs are now easily controlled, and last, but perhaps not least, Cuban competition garrotted our planters. Cuban pines had better rates and were given faster service by our railroads, then the only means of transportation for our producers. It seems a fact that up to this year Cuba has given too much competition for any attempt to revive the industry. This I wonder? Pineapples have been damaged by root-knot nematodes—do you suppose that back there we had some of these fancy nemas we see popping up everywhere—or almost!

Now what? Palm Beach County second to Dade in number of mango trees finds that by far the largest volume of mangos are door yard trees. This, we believe will continue to be the case. The mango, for me, makes a good shade tree and is a tree of good appearance. It will stand severe pruning and can be shaped according to needs. We believe that other tropical fruits will become more popular around the homes of our county and that better quality in most of these plants will develop as more seedlings develop.

We believe there is a field for some part-time nurserymen to develop, propagate and sell superior varieties of many little-used fruits. We need to know and to assist such a person to develop dependable, merchantable varieties. We are still willing to be of assistance.

DEVELOPING NEW PEACH VARIETIES FOR FLORIDA

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The results of several seasons of peach variety testing in Florida were summarized in 1954 (1). A few varieties were suggested for commercial growing in northwestern Florida and one of these, Maygold, is now growing on several hundred acres in the Quincy area. Maygold requires 650 hours of chilling below 45 degrees F. by mid-February. No varieties with lower chilling requirement were found suitable for peninsular Florida where 200 to 500 hours below 45 degrees are the normal expectation.

More recent tests have included the Tejon variety developed at the Citrus Experiment Station, Riverside, California. Its chilling requirement appears to be about 400 hours which would make it of some interest in north-central Florida, although fruit shape is poor. Further experience is necessary before it can be recommended for central Florida areas that normally receive under 300 hours below 45 degrees by early February.

In order to obtain commercial type peaches with very low chilling requirements, a program of breeding was initiated, beginning with a few crosses in 1952. The first sizable lot of second-generation seedlings was started in 1956. Much progress has been made in a relatively short time since then. The variety Flordawon

¹Florida Agricultural Experiment Stations Journal Series, No. 1320.