



in pursuit of winning cultivars

Posted by [Michael Phillips](#)
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[Michael Phillips](#)
[in pursuit of winning cultivars](#)

April 13, 2017 06:11PM

Deliberating crossing select varieties to breed new cultivars takes dedication. Here in the network, I know John Bunker and Ike Kerschner have seedlings under evaluation. Eliza shared a great blog post by Steven Edholm which speaks to how you go about choosing parent varieties.

<http://skillcult.com/blog/2017/4/9/apple-breeding-promising-lines-and-possibilities-what-im-crossing-and-pursuing>

Consider this the thread to share more varietal daydreaming!

[Lost Nation Orchard](#)

Zone 4b in New Hampshire

[Reply](#) [Quote](#)

[Pat Pryal](#)

[Re: in pursuit of winning cultivars](#)

April 16, 2017 05:37PM

Thanks Michael, interesting article. If I were 20 years younger I'd probably dabble a bit in doing the same, but not anymore....way too busy in the spring to mess around with apple breeding. LOL

[Reply](#) [Quote](#)

[Karen Brindle](#)

[Re: in pursuit of winning cultivars](#)

April 19, 2017 09:44AM

Yes, thank you for sharing the blog post! I too wish I had the time and space and energy to add apple breeding to my project list, many of the varieties he is working with we grow, including the Etter varieties Vixen, Wicksen and Rubaiyat. His quest to breed apples with extraordinary taste rather than supermarket appeal is wonderful. And I applaud his goal to breed a great red flesh eating apple. I recently bought some Cameo organic apples at Costco. I remember when Cameo came out in the '90s. It was my favorite store-bought apple for lunch during work in the city. Crisp, more juice than red delicious but similar flavor. I ate lots of them. The ones I recently bough were awful. Larger, much paler in color, and utterly tasteless. I ended up giving most of them to our horse. What happened? What a huge disappointment. At least I can still feed my apple habit with the organic pink lady that are still decent until our trees produce their bounty again. I did discover a pip growing in our flowerbed last summer. Moved it to a better place and am letting it grow. Worst case scenario is I can top graft to something else if the apples turn out yucky 🙄 tongue sticking out smiley

[Vista Ridge Orchard](#)

Zone 8a in Washington

235 Cider and heritage apple trees, 72 varieties,

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[Pat Pryal](#)

[Re: in pursuit of winning cultivars](#)

April 19, 2017 06:13PM

I bought a Cameo tree about 3 years ago and let it fruit last year for the first time. The apples were absolutely delicious, much better than I would have imagined. Beautiful, firm, blemish free apples, more sweet than tart, but still a great eating apple right off the tree. I thought that at some point I would end up top working it to something better, but definitely not anymore. And that tree was given absolutely no attention at all, and growing in relatively poor sandier soil. IMO, a much better apple than Gala, Fuji, and even Honeycrisp. Check it out !

Pat

Brampton Lake Orchards

Zone 4a Upper Michigan

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[Leslie Price](#)

[Re: in pursuit of winning cultivars](#)

April 27, 2020 11:41PM

Yes Pat, Cameo is a great apple! Its a classic example of the right apple for the right location but if grown in the mass growing areas of too much heat the flavor and texture will suffer but they will still go to market and the customer will get bad apple eating experience. Ambrosia is another good example of this. You just have to know where your apples came from. Which of course the average shopper doesn't.

As to breeding, I had the privilege of being part of a breeding program at WSU Mt Vernon REU in the mid 1990's. We were not funded for this but my supervisor just took the initiative and made it happen. I didn't really think much of it at the time, still young and impatient, but in retrospect I can

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see how interesting and important it was. Thinking covertly we enlarged our rootstock nursery to an acre and here we planted seeds we collected from apples we shook from a row of Prima trees that was bordering a row of Alkmene trees. This was all very tedious, thank goodness for temp and volunteer help. What we ended up with was thousands and thousands of trees. I cant remember the exact amount but it was many thousands. These trees were only a few inches apart but by the second year it was time to start culling. Some trees were unhealthy, weak. Some trees looked more like a rootstock. Since Alkmene is a week grower by nature we were ultimately hoping for a stronger growing version, scab resistant, same flavor qualities of Alkmene, eating apple. By 3rd year and heavy blooming we could heavily cull trees that had not grown much or bloomed yet. In subsequent years it was easy to cull for scab and as the trees fruited, cull out the ones with tiny fruit (a lot of those). I cant remember how long the project took, I worked through 2000 then off and on special projects through 2005. It was tedious but interesting times. My partner and I would collect data on the trees several times a year. She would sit on the RV and I would yell out numbers for her to record. As time went on it became clear that we were not going to get lucky with an eating apple. All the eating size apples had problems.

What we did notice, however was 1 small, very colorful apple that was, so far, scab immune. This apple had a wonderful crabapple flavor, not so overpowering that you couldn't just eat it raw. Upon testing it had the expected very high pectin but also nice tannin, bitter, astringent. As it turned out this was the only apple to come out of this breeding trial. I think though that we were lucky to get anything. It took WSU forever to name the apple then they changed the name a couple of times as is pretty common with new varieties. I know Raintree Nursery sells the trees as Puget Spice. I, of course, have had trees of them for many years and use them for a source of organic pectin, hard cider blending, and of course all the usual culinary crab uses.

Leslie Price
Jones Creek Farms
skagitvalleyfruit.com
Lyman, WA
zone 8a

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