

A long history of fruit production in Colorado

Did you know that Colorado has a long history of fruit production? The people who first started growing fruit in Colorado were a hardy, determined lot who had to learn through trial and error. We owe a great deal of thanks for fruit production in Colorado to these early pioneers.

It was once a very common saying that “you can’t grow fruit in Colorado”. Fortunately, the unwavering groundbreakers didn’t listen to the naysayers. Their persistence and determination during the costly experimental stages of fruit production rewarded them. They overcame the challenge of learning what varieties would grow in Colorado’s climate and how to grow fruit by means of irrigation and methods of treatments. According to the Boulder Apple Tree Project, Colorado was one of the top apple-growing states in the United States. Once, there were thousands of acres of orchards in the Denver area and along the Front Range. A CSU bulletin titled Fruit Interests of the State tells us that by the 1890’s apples were the primary fruit crops, but plums, pears, peaches and cherries were also grown across the state. It’s exciting that a number of these historic orchards that were started in 1868 still stand!

In September of 1895 the first fruit festival was held in the Grand Valley. It’s estimated that 10,000 people came to taste Mesa County peaches. William Jennings Bryan was the guest speaker for the crowd of visitors. This was such a success that in 1909 another celebration, called Peach Days, was held in Grand Junction. This time President Taft was the guest of the city and the fruit growers and spoke on the wonderful fruit grown in Mesa County.

On the Western Slope of Colorado, the Grand Valley apple boom occurred about 1895 when promoters planted thousands of acres, in five, ten, twenty, and forty-acre plots. Western Slope fruit won prizes throughout all parts of the U.S. for the fruit’s beauty, color, and taste. In 1908 fourteen varieties of Grand Valley apples won sweepstakes at Cornell University. When thirteen



Gardening A to Z

By Linda Corwine McIntosh

carloads of fruit from Colorado and other Western states were exhibited at the National Apple Exposition held in Denver in January 1910, Grand Junction won the sweepstakes for the best carload of apples along with a \$1,000 award. Fruita came in second place with \$500. In 1913, Grand Valley apples took first prize in Cleveland, OH. It’s said that Grand Valley fruit won blue ribbons in all the major cities where it was exhibited.

During the apple boom of 1895, a large number of the newly planted orchards were sold to eastern buyers, mostly professional people. Unfortunately, these people knew very little, if anything, about growing fruit, especially in irrigated orchards. As a result, over irrigating and poor soil drainage led to a buildup of salts and over-watered, stressed trees. This of course led to unhealthy trees and lowered production. Codling moth (worms in apples & pears) soon became an overwhelming problem with neglected orchards of apples and pears everywhere. The trees were so infested with pests that in many areas there was no hope for any solution. Before they knew it, the fruit industry was almost ruined. Fortunately, many of the orchards were eventually converted to more tolerant crops.

In the Montrose area, during the early 1900s, John Ashenfelter owned probably one of the largest orchards in the state. Edward Silva, and later George Phillips, kept the farm “as neat and clean as a new pin.” In 1908 the entire shipment from this 360 acre farm included 26,408 boxes of apples, 2,485 boxes of peaches, and 54,045 pounds of dried prunes. Fruit from the orchard was awarded at least 49 premiums at the Colorado State Fair. Other prominent fruit growers in the Montrose area included the Bell brothers, Heath, Upton, Kyle, Wilson, Getz, Anderson, Keller, Price, Doland and Tobin.

It’s so fantastic that people are now looking into the history of these orchards and the trees that once grew there. Organizations such as The Applecore Project of Western Colorado are advancing fruit tree



Thanks to these brave pioneers we are now enjoying the fruits of their labor. (Submitted Photo)

preservation through the use of mapping tree varieties, identifying trees, grafting and planting new trees, as well as documenting and connecting local resources towards preservation. They are rediscovering the stories of the people who planted and cared for these trees.

The Montezuma Orchard Restoration Project is another great organization helping to preserve the fruit history. For example, did you know there was once a Colorado Orange Apple? This “winter” apple was a mix of sweet and tart flavor with a surprising orange-ish color. Thanks to Jude Schuenemeyer, with the Montezuma Orchard Restoration Project in southwestern Colorado, this apple has been rediscovered. The apple was believed to be extinct. But one day Jude

says he and his wife were in an orchard in Canyon City when “lo and behold, on the ground underneath the tree in the duff, there were these orange-blushed apples. And then on the tree, there were some of the apples still hanging.” They say the apples have a fantastic complex flavor. This wonderful apple almost went extinct because people preferred bright red apples over this unique variety. Through DNA testing and comparing their find to some archival wax apple replicas at Colorado State University they’re now about 98% sure that they have discovered the elusive apple. How great is that!

Linda Corwine McIntosh is an Advanced Master Gardener, ISA Certified Arborist, and a Commercial Pesticide Applicator.

Wild hogs in Colorado

I was riding my ATV along a section of the South Canal, in an area where it passes through some hay fields. Several hogs were crossing a pasture area and heading for cover. As I studied the area, there was no place those hogs appeared to come from; no pens, buildings, fenced areas. Those critters were running wild.

During my years in Florida, I spent much time both professionally and recreationally, doing my best to relieve the State of some of their hog population. We would get called to golf courses (golf courses are a naturally occurring phenomenon in Florida) to view damage.

A groundskeeper would show us several acres of greens, totally destroyed and ripped up. He would claim there had to be 50 hogs to do this much damage overnight. Actually, it was more like 2 or 3 that did the damage.

These destructive critters can tear up acres looking for grubs and other insects, usually during the overnight hours. We used to call the “piney rooters” because of the damage they could do to landscape by “rooting” up everything green.

At first thought, feral hogs in Colorado seemed like a good idea. Folks in Texas have a good time hunting them and they seem like a never-ending food source. Landowners have found hog hunting to be a good source of income through trespass fees and hunting fees, charged to hunters.

Florida, Georgia, and Texas have untold numbers of outfitters and hunting lodges specializing in feral hog hunting. The State of Texas at this point would rather have a cyclone than more feral hogs. Texas has lost the war on controlling them.

Travis Black, from Colorado Parks and



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Wildlife (CPW) is the resident expert on feral hogs. He told me, “Those pigs you saw are probably not feral hogs. Most likely, they escaped from some farmer and are living wild.”

“It takes three full generations for an escaped hog to be considered in a total feral state. A hog reaches maturity at 6 months of age and can begin breeding, so populations can increase in a hurry,” Black continued.

Sows have a 115-day gestation period, and can have 2, and sometimes 3 litters a year. Under the proper conditions each litter can have up to 12 piglets. With that type of breeding efficiency, the feral hog population can double within a year. No wonder wildlife managers call feral hogs “four-legged fire ants.”

The term feral hog and wild hog are generally used interchangeably. Feral applies to a hog that was once domesticated or whose ancestors were domesticated but is now living in the wild with no sense of domestication.

If you need a reason why we do not want feral hogs in Colorado, one needs to look no further than Texas. Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) began removing the feral hogs in 1982. Since then, there are more than 10 times the hogs.

It is estimated that hunters, trappers and wildlife managers kill around 750,000 hogs a year in Texas; that’s 30 percent of the population. With that many hogs taken, the population is still increasing by around 20 percent a year. This is a war that Texas is losing.

Wildlife managers in Texas estimate that

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