

# Commercialization of New Varieties: A Grower's Perspective

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I am always looking for and testing new varieties of stone fruit. We have many acres of test plots of test selections and named varieties, but the question is, what am I looking for in a new variety if I am going to plant it commercially on my farm?

Some more specific questions are:

1. Will it thrive and survive in my location? Hard winters, damp springs and short growing season are my challenges on this front.
2. Will it fruit consistently and give me high quality fruit?
3. How will this new variety fit in with my current tried and true varieties? A few of the qualities in a new variety I am looking for include: are they unique (shape, color, flavor), do they ripen earlier or later, are they larger fruited or have a healthier, longer lived tree than my current varieties.
4. Then I have to ask myself "will anyone buy it"? Will it be a replacement for a current west-coast variety or something completely new? Can I compete on price with my competition? What market will this variety do well in (farm markets or supermarkets)?

Below are some examples of my thought process with regard to specific fruits:

**Sweet cherries.** Fruit size. 10 row min. Earlier and later ripening. Avoid the July glut. Rain-crack resistant. Canker resistant. Need black or white cherries, not red. Varieties that we are going with include: Rynbrant (real early) and Sweetheart (so far that latest we can plant).

**Tart cherries.** Need a replacement for Montmorency. Larger fruit. Better color. Better flavor. Earlier and later ripening. Grow for fresh markets. Danube and Jubileum seem to fit the bill. Need more options. Hard to find in the US. Need to test more varieties from Europe.

**Apricots.** Late Blooming. Spread out the season. Early Blush is a great find. Now I have a 10-day gap until all the other varieties come in.

**Japanese plums.** I am new with this crop. Need fruit size and consistent cropping. Late blooming. Winners for us so far are Fortune, Early Magic, Obilinaya, Simka, Vanier, and Early Golden. I still have a lot of test selections and varieties to test.

**European plums.** Fruit size. Must taste good. Spread out season. Skin must be blue/purple, not red, although, I am very interested in yellow European plums. Can pass them off as Japanese plums. We do well with this crop, as long as the fruit taste good. Too many poor tasting fruit on this market (picked too early). I get very concerned about getting the variety I want from a commercial nursery. Different strains or different varieties with the same name (Early Italian for one). Want to use the budwood from the trees I have tested, but then you have the virus issue.

**Peaches and nectarines.** Flavor, color and fruit size. Very interested in unique shapes and flavors. I am not interested in fruits that are 100% red. If you cannot see the background color, it can not be picked correctly.

Testing new varieties of stone fruit is much easier than testing apples. With apples everything is the variety name. If you have some quantity of an odd variety, you can not sell it readily unless you have a farm market. With stone fruit it is different. A peach can always be called a Red Haven and a black cherry is always a Bing. Marketing small lots of odd varieties is not a problem.

On-site testing of new stone fruit selections and varieties is very important. What looks good in California does not always look good in the East. What looks good in the Carolinas does not always

Marketing a new variety of stone fruit is much easier than it is for a new variety of apple. Consequently, marketing small lots of odd varieties is not a problem. However, on site testing of new stone fruit selections and varieties is very important. What does well in California may not do well here. Nonetheless, there are many new exciting varieties to test and develop for NY growers.

look good in the North and it seems as though nothing ever looks as good as the nursery catalog pictures.

As a side note, I am interested in club or controlled varieties. The concept of controlling the supply and orderly marketing of variety may be foreign to a lot of growers, but it is happening. We must remember, we grow fruit to make a living. It is not a hobby. Anything that can be done to increase the chances that I can grow the crop profitably, I am interested in.



*Jim Bittner is an apple, pear and stone fruit grower and president of Singer Farms. Jim also serves as president of the New York State Horticultural Society.*