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MISCELLANEOUS NUT CROPS

by

C. E. Schuster, Horticulturist
United States Department of Agriculture
Bureau of Plant Industry
Division of Fruit and Vegetable Crops and Diseases
Corvallis, Oregon

Federal Cooperative Extension Service
Oregon State College
Corvallis

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Wm. A. Schoenfeld, Director

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Inquiries are frequently made for information regarding the culture in Oregon of almond, beechnut, black walnuts, butternut, chestnuts, hickories, pecan, pinion, and tung nuts. This circular has been prepared to answer such inquiries and to give the most reliable information available regarding the possibilities of their culture in Oregon. None of these nuts offer any appreciable opportunities for commercial production in this state but certain of them may be grown in an experimental way with some degree of personal satisfaction and enjoyment on the part of the owner. Some, like the black walnut and shagbark hickory, which were brought to Oregon in 1847 by Henderson Lewelling, have undergone a long period of trial. Others have been tested for a short time only or in very small numbers. Most of the information regarding them has been gathered from the Willamette Valley as more trials have been made there than in any other part of the state.

No attempt is made to encourage or discourage the experimental planting of any of these nut trees. The statements made embody the facts as they are known from information gathered over a period of years. The introduction of new varieties, new methods of propagation, or changing agricultural programs may alter the situation regarding these nuts at any time.

Almonds

In 1919 it was estimated that there were 200 acres of almonds in commercial orchards in Oregon. These orchards have all disappeared and almond trees are now found only in home orchards or as isolated trees in widely scattered localities. Only a very few of these trees located in the most favorable places bear anything approximating a regular crop.

The almond blossoms very early and the crops are subject to frosts in some localities and to cold rains that prevent pollination in others. Furthermore, there are several diseases and insects that attack the almond as well as the commonly grown stone fruits. Since the trees must be sprayed thoroughly and regularly for the control of these troubles the few almond trees are usually neglected and survive only a few years. The almond is self-sterile and in plantings of a single variety the trees have failed to bear even when other conditions have been favorable. In all almond plantings two or more varieties that blossom at the same time must be included so that the flowers of one may be pollinated with pollen from the other.

For those wishing to plant almonds, the following are selected from varieties recommended for California and which will cross-pollinate each other under conditions prevailing there: (1) Ne Plus Ultra and I.X.L., (2) Nonpariel and Eureka, (3) Drake and Texas. These are given in the order of blooming. Some local nurserymen are propagating nursery trees from scions taken from bearing trees when they do not know the variety. In such cases care should be exercised to obtain nursery trees propagated not only from the bearing trees but also from the ones that cross-pollinate them.

Beechnuts

A few beechnut trees are growing in the Pacific Northwest, but seldom do they produce any nuts. In the native habitat it is reported that the beech tree requires up to 35 years to attain bearing age and after that crops are borne only at intervals of 3 to 5 years. Under suitable conditions the beech is a good ornamental tree but little can be expected as far as nut production is concerned.

Black Walnuts

The Eastern black walnut was brought to Oregon in 1847 and the Hinds (Northern California) black walnut shortly afterward by persons coming into the state from California. Both species grow and bear as well here under cultivation as in their native habitat. The eastern black walnut has probably been successfully planted more often in eastern Oregon than any of the other nut trees. Among the improved varieties from which the kernels can be readily removed are the Stabler, Thomas, and Ohio. The Stabler is somewhat erratic in bearing and filling the kernel. The Thomas bears well but the tree is not so satisfactory. In rich soil this variety grows so rapidly that often with the first fall rain considerable breakage occurs in the tree tops. The Ohio, like the Stabler, produces a fine tree, and it bears fairly well; but as a dooryard tree it has one disadvantage. The nuts in the hulls are large and heavy, sometimes weighing ~~from four to~~ *several* ~~seven~~ ounces each and are not to be lightly regarded when falling from the top of a tree.

Japanese walnuts and Heartnuts are apparently very exacting as regards the soil conditions required for good tree growth and nut production. It is seldom that a tree is found in a healthy, vigorous condition, and bearing good crops of nuts.

Butternut

Butternut trees were introduced into Oregon early in the settlement of the state but today relatively few trees are to be found that bear heavily. Very little is known as to the soil, cultural or pollination requirements of these trees.

Chestnuts

The destruction of the chestnut forests of the eastern United States by the chestnut blight disease has resulted in many inquiries regarding the possibilities of commercial chestnut culture in the Pacific Northwest. Seedling chestnut trees grow well and often produce heavily but the nuts borne are too variable in size and quality for commercial purposes. Recent attempts to establish commercial orchards of grafted trees have resulted in failure due to death of the trees from imperfect union between the stock and scion. No assurance can be given that a high percentage of grafted trees of any variety planted will come into bearing since poor graft unions may cause their death before that time. At this time some combinations of stocks and scions are under test which give indications that good graft unions may be ultimately obtained.

Chestnuts invariably need cross pollination either due to self-sterility or to the fact that pollen is not shed when the female flowers are receptive. In addition, many varieties and seedlings fail to produce any pollen in the catkins so they will not cross pollinate other varieties. On that account single trees and occasionally groups of trees produce only empty burrs. This has been the experience with American, European and Japanese varieties as well as hybrids. Recently some selections of Chinese chestnuts have been introduced for trial.

Hickories

Although the hickories were among the first nut trees introduced into the state they have been seldom planted. A few trees are known that bear regularly, but the nuts are reputed to be often poorly filled. The long period of time required for the trees to come into bearing, up to fifteen years, has been an important factor limiting the planting of hickories. The new varieties are claimed to bear much earlier than seedlings but they have not been under trial long enough to warrant any conclusions as to their superiority.

Pecans

Pecan trees grow well in the milder sections of the state, sometimes setting crops each year but seldom maturing even a few nuts. In most cases the trees do not set crops, probably due to faulty pollination. When crops are set on the trees, the nuts are usually very immature when frosts occur in the fall. In instances when some nuts have matured, it has been in those years when the summer has been longer and hotter than normal, but even then only a few nuts have been reported as maturing on any tree.

During the past 40 years seedlings and varieties from all parts of the pecan belt of the southeastern United States have been brought in and tried out. To date there is no indication that any variety is satisfactory in Oregon.

Pinion Nuts

There is no information on the possibility of producing pinion nuts in Oregon.

Tung Nuts

The plantings of tung trees have been restricted to the southeastern part of the United States, especially in that area bordering the Gulf of Mexico.