

Store-shelf Fruit Ranking

We usually chat about nuts, but nuts are not doing much just now, so here are some observations about fruit. Our experience growing fruit trees has been a pure flop, so our fruit gathering experience is limited to the produce department of the big-chain groceries.

As we follow in our empty cart, all the fruits are absolutely stunning in their bins. Obviously they can't sell anything with the slightest blemish. However, when we take these beauties home and try to eat them, our experience is all over the map, from heavenly; to so bad you can't hold it in your mouth. In the last year, I have encountered two PhDs who are specializing in "shelf-life" of fruit. I think that's about lookin' good for a longer time.

What about reliable taste? At least some varieties of all these fruits are wonderful in the orchard, but that may not be the variety that stores and "travels" well. Due to their basic nature, breeding, harvest timing, and transport and storage methods, some fruit species and varieties are much better than others at arriving eatable from our shopping bag. What follows is my ranking, from best to worse:

10 - Bananas These beauties come from Central America and arrive in their bin a little on the green side. A day after we get them home, they peak and are excellent for another 5 days (if they last that long) – then mush. The banana industry has nailed the entire process – good reliable bananas every time!

9. – Sweet Cherries I can't remember getting a bad batch. They only show up during the Travers City Summer (3 weeks). Maybe that's the key, they don't try to store and sell off-season.

8. – Grapes These beauties are almost always good. Maybe one bunch in 10 is sour, which can be dodged by sneaking a sample.

7. – Blueberries I was a professional blueberry picker during high school. I could make \$10 a day if I didn't eat any. These are usually good and a bad package is easy to spot – green or limp. One great mystery to me is seeing a package in mid-winter labeled "Michigan Fresh Blueberries" – magic???

6. – Apples These are good more often than bad. Selecting only Fujii would move them up a notch. The nitrogen storage has done wonders to the year-round offering, but some stores try to go a second year, or they had a gas leak – beautiful skin, brown center, seed starting to sprout, taste yuk!

5. – Oranges A perfect 5 – good exactly half the time. Oranges are difficult to judge from their perfect outer appearance. Sometimes a little green shows through the orange dye and is a give-a-way for a sour surprise inside. Florida Navels around Christmas deserve a 9.

4. – Pears We had 2 pear trees where I had my fetchin' up. The pears were too hard to eat and then a couple of days later they were mush. In between, they were an epicurean wonder. Their basic nature is usually too big a challenge for the big-chain process.

3. – Peaches Maybe if you never ate a Red Haven dead-ripe off a tree, you wouldn't be disappointed with the beautiful rock-hard tasteless offering in the produce department. I'm still looking for my first good peach from the store. Once when I weighed about 40 pounds, I climbed up in a peach tree and ate peaches until I couldn't hold any more. A Cedar Waxwing came and landed a couple of feet away and stared at me. I don't know what he was thinkin'. He never said.

2. – Strawberries Kay buys these beauties all the time for decoration. I sample them and found a good one once. We grew 6 varieties long ago and 2 were wonderful, but I forgot the variety names – maybe Early-Glow. The University of Kentucky did a variety/taste trial a few years ago.

1. – Plums My grandfather had 3 Santa Rosa plum trees. There were no blemishes because he sprayed with arsenic. He propped up the loaded branches with hundreds of poles which spent their off season leaning against the outhouse. Our family (9 in all) made quick work of 5 gallons every year – marvelous! The stores have varieties of the rock-hard gassed beauties all year round. So beautiful, I occasionally am suckered into buying a few. Every time I've had exactly one bite, followed by a spit, followed by Listerine. Can this whole industry survive on only one-time buyers?



Maybe we should order some trees - yes - blight resistant.

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