

Muscadines

Unlike some exotic horticultural crops which were introduced to Georgia for cultivation, early settlers found the native muscadine grape growing abundantly throughout the state.

Muscadine grapes are considered a "true" southern fruit. The scuppernong, a muscadine variety is believed to have originated in Terrell County, North Carolina, according to Aubrey Owen, secretary-treasurer of the Georgia Muscadine Growers Association. The fruit was probably named for the nearby Scuppernong River. Since muscadines were primarily found near old Indian settlements in early Georgia, it is thought that the Indians were responsible for bringing the fruit into the state.

Many early settlers in Georgia were of European origin, so they were naturally interested in wine making. Vines of native grapes, however, tended to grow high into trees. Because the fruit was difficult to harvest in large quantities for wine making, it was often left to be eaten by birds and wild animals. As a result, early settlers turned their attention to imported grape varieties from France, Italy and other countries. Unfortunately, these imports did not thrive in their new climate. The small amount of wine they did manage to produce was described as, "sad stuff, and bitter, rather the juice of the stalk than of the grape."

Around 1816, Thomas McCall of Laurens County began experimenting with wine making from native grapes. His wine is claimed to have been famous in many surrounding communities. In 1826, he pro-

duced 860 gallons from his two acre vineyard.

In the mid 1800's, a suitable wine market did not exist in Georgia. For example, in 1845, James Horsley of Upson County, made large quantities of scuppernong wine, but the poor market ultimately discouraged him. About this time, a correspondent with the Southern Cultivator wrote, ". . . consumers of wine in this state will scarcely be induced to prefer domestic unless it were offered to them under some outlandish name or unintelligible brand." Some even accused the Northern states of buying Southern wine, adulterating it in their cellars, and sending it back to the South under their label for a substantial profit.

In 1848, Charles Axt, a German vine grower, settled in Augusta and established vineyards. He believed that with proper management, Georgia vineyards would excel. By 1855, his efforts were rewarded when his grape and wine proved to be an outstanding sensation at the Atlanta Fair. His success in wine making received further recognition in Cincinnati in 1859 when his Georgia wine of the 1857 vintage received wide acclaim and a higher price than Ohio wines.

During the same time peach production began to flourish in Georgia, a few adventurous farmers tried to commercialize grapes. The War was hardly over before a campaign was initiated to encourage more