

Peaches

Peaches have been a trademark of Georgia for a long time. The state was among the first to become involved in the commercial peach industry during the 1800's.

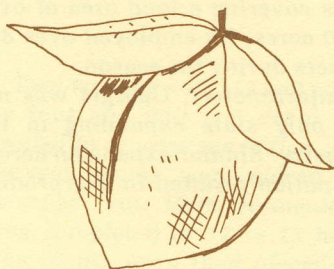
Peaches were included in the Trustee's Garden on the coast during Oglethorpe's time in the 1730's. Early settlers continued to grow them successfully throughout Georgia's colonial period. By 1800, there were a few large orchards in Wilkes County and other upcountry areas. Some farmers are said to have had as many as 5000 trees.

Because the fruit was highly perishable, early orchards were established primarily for home use. Unimproved seedlings planted during this time yielded fruit that was often hard and bitter. Peaches were usually used to provide food for hogs and make brandy.

Due to the increasing interest in cotton, many orchards were neglected or pushed up to make more room for cotton. However with the expansion of the railroad providing prospects for outside markets, peaches became more appealing to Georgia farmers.

In 1845, an editorial appeared in the *Southern Cultivator* recommending that farmers located near railroads leading to major cities grow peaches on their poor sandy soil to supply those markets.

Robert Nelson, a political refugee from Denmark, established Troup Hill Nursery in Macon in 1852. Unlike northern nurserymen who grew peaches from seeds, Nelson insisted that more uniform peaches could be produced by grafting from parent stock. His skill in fruit prop-



agation, along with his encouragement of commercial peach production in middle Georgia, played a major role in stimulating this industry in antebellum Georgia.

The commercial peach industry rapidly expanded in the decade following 1850. In 1851, R.J. Moses shipped a basket of peaches to New York first by stage to Macon, rail to Savannah, and finally steamer to New York. He received \$30 for the shipment. Pleased with his experiment, Moses expanded his orchard. After the completion of the railroad to Columbus, he continued to ship extensively to New York. His sales reached \$7500 in 1861.

Although the Civil War put the rapidly expanding peach industry temporarily on hold, after the war the state continued in commercial production. The development of new and superior peach varieties played an important role in this expansion.

The Elberta peach, developed by Samuel Rumph of Marshallville in 1872, was perhaps the most famous and popular of these new varieties. Named for his wife, the Elberta was a sensation on the northern market.

No other varieties could be compared with it in color, size, and quality.

Lewis H. Rumph, also of Marshallville, developed the Georgia Belle and E. W. Hiley of Fort Valley had the largest orchard in Georgia as well as the world during that time. There were approximately 350,000 trees covering a land area of over 2000 acres. He employed over 800 pickers during the season.

Unfortunately, Georgia was not the only state expanding in the industry. Similar expansion across the nation resulted in overproduc-

tion and low prices. The Depression of 1929 only made matters worse.

Following the Depression, production fell sharply due to a series of bad crop years and bad weather. In 1950, production fell to 845,000 bushels, the smallest harvest recorded by the Georgia Crop Reporting Service since it was established in 1908.

Georgia has since recovered from the bad years. Although no longer the nation's top producer, it is still known as the "Peach State" and the fruit remains one of Georgia's top horticultural crops.

Indigo

Although no longer grown in Georgia, indigo was one of the first commercial crops produced in the state. During colonial times, the indigo plant was a primary source of the deep blue dye, indigo, used to color cotton and wool.

Georgia's indigo industry began back in the 1740's when the plant was discussed during a meeting of the Trustees. Botanist, Robert Miller informed the group that indigo was better suited for Georgia's climate than colonies further North. Shortly thereafter, indigo plantings flourished along the state's coast. The crop was well-established along the Ogeechee River and the coastal islands by 1750.

Unlike rice, which required tedious, experienced labor along with a substantial cash outlay, indigo production could be pursued on a family scale. The seeds usually were obtained from Guatemala and planted around the end of March. The crop was harvested for processing when it reached full bloom approximately four months after planting.

The average yield was normally a little more than 40 pounds per acre. With Georgia's long growing season, plantings were often staggered in order to obtain as many as three cuttings during a season.

Although cultivation of indigo was not difficult, processing was an involved, dreaded task; the stalks were claimed to have given off an offensive, sickening odor. The terrible odor and flies associated with processing the stalks prompted the Commons House Assembly to require the residue from the plants be burned or destroyed.

Two wooden vats (12 feet square by four and half feet deep) were needed to process the indigo. After harvest, stalks were placed in a "steeper" vat. Here, fermentation was completed in 12 to 15 hours. The plants were then placed in a "battery" vat and stirred and agitated until a bluish precipitate resulted. Lime water was added to accelerate the formation of this precipitate; once formed, the mixture was allowed to settle eight to ten hours.

To complete processing, water was drained from the vat leaving the precipitate on the bottom; this was strained and pressed until it was water free. The dried indigo was cut into two inch square pieces and dried in a special building.

Indigo blocks were carefully turned three to four times daily to prevent rotting and to check for insect infestation. The finished product was determined by the merchants by observing the closeness of the grains and the degree of brilliance of the violet blue.



Indigo pods