THE JABOTICABA IN FLORIDA—AN ADDENDUM

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At the 1936 meeting of this Institute, we had the pleasure of hearing a most interesting account from Dr. David Fairchild of his two small jaboticaba trees, one of which had finally fruited in 1935 after twelve years of watchful waiting by its owner. After telling us in his usual charming way of the history of efforts to introduce this little-known Brazilian fruit, and describing in detail the characteristics of the tree and fruit as observed in its native country by Popenoe and his colleagues, Dr. Fairchild summarized as follows:

"So it seems to have come about that my two little trees near the wall are the only ones left in this region, unless somewhere there exists a tree of which I have no knowledge and which this note may bring out into the open."

Such caution in statement might well have seemed needless in the case of a man so well versed in Florida's tropical fruits and their places of trial, but the event has proved the wisdom of using exactly this caution. For not one, but two trees have come to light. I do not say "found," for like the Chinaman who was asked if he was lost, and replied, "No, me here; hotel lost," so these trees have been right there and unknown only to the great majority of us.

Last year as I was entering the meeting hall for the session of this Institute in Winter Haven, I was accosted by a gentleman who asked if I would like to see his fruiting specimen of jaboticaba tree. It would not have been more of a surprise if he had asked if I would like to see a bearing mangosteen tree, for I was only too well aware of the failure of repeated efforts to introduce the jaboticaba. And I was fully persuaded that the two little trees on the "Kampong" in Coconut Grove were the only ones in captivity of any size at all, so far as the United States were concerned, for I had been searching out rare specimens of tropical fruit trees for eight years and thought I knew where nearly all of them were. So while I told the gentleman that I would be very glad to go with him immediately after the meeting, I must confess that I did not expect to
find at most more than some rather unusual species of Eugenia—and perhaps not even that. For I remembered the cashew tree which I had been taken to see in Clearwater, and which had turned out to be a Physic-nut instead; and there was the man who had written me about his black sapotes, which had proven to be mountain soursops. Not to mention the Miami concern which advertised a bearing breadfruit tree, which I found to be a species of screw-pine. But in spite of these and many other experiences of mistaken identity, I was taking no chances of missing something, and I said I would go.

At the close of the meeting, I went with Mrs. Krome to the home of our guide, Mr. Ford J. DeHaven, there in Winter Haven, and beside his kitchen door we found ourselves confronted by a real, live, fruiting jaboticaba tree. It was about ten feet high and equally broad, looking exceedingly healthy, and when we pushed aside the branches we saw that the limbs were well covered with blue-black fruit. My own first thought was to secure a camera and obtain photographs of the tree and fruit, but Mrs. Krome at once asked if she might take a few fruit to Dr. Fairchild, whom she knew would be delighted beyond measure to learn of the existence of this fine tree.

It was my first opportunity to taste this fruit, and I cannot say that I was too favorably impressed. In Brazil the jaboticaba is used almost wholly as a fresh fruit, and Dorsett, Shamel and Popenoe say of it: "One not infrequently finds a jaboticaba with the disagreeable resinous tang common to a number of myrtaceous fruits. But a good jaboticaba is so thoroughly enjoyable as to tempt one to keep on picking and eating the fruits indefinitely." Some of that resinous flavor I noted, but that is purely a matter of variety selection and even, perhaps, of the individual tasting.

It is in order to have a permanent record of the history of this tree that I have prepared this paper. For the most part I am obliged to Mr. DeHaven for the details concerned, supplied me when I first visited the tree. However, when Dr. Fairchild had an opportunity to pay a visit to this tree last October, he unearthed some facts which I had overlooked, and for these I am indebted to the paper which he has recently written for distribution to the members of the Fairchild Tropical Garden. I asked Mr. DeHaven last year if he would not himself prepare and read this paper, but he has asked that I do it for him.

In 1911, Dr. William Hentz of City Point, Florida (on the Indian River just above Cocoa), made quite a stay in Rio de Janeiro, and among other things he made the acquaintance of the jaboticaba, as this is very popular in South Brazil. He was so pleased with it that he bought from a local nurseryman six small inarched trees of what were said to be the best varieties, and these he shipped on the same boat on which he returned to New York. By a most unfortunate error, the little trees were forwarded to Florida from New York by freight, instead of by express as had been intended, and when the box was opened at City Point the trees were in very bad condition from drying out. Indeed, they all looked to be dead, but Dr. Hentz had gone to too much trouble in getting them to give up hope easily, and so he set them all out and gave them every possible care. Only one tree repaid his efforts by survival, and the record showed this one to be a true jaboticaba of the Murta variety.

The little lone survivor made exceedingly slow growth and at the end of seven years had not yet reached a height of three feet. Such was his interest in it, however, and so strong a desire did he have to taste again the delicious fruit he had learned to like in Brazil, that when Dr. Hentz moved from City Point to Winter Haven in 1918, he dug up the little jaboticaba tree and took it with him. In his new home, he planted the little immigrant tree near the kitchen door on the south side of the house, where it had protection from cold and was easily accessible for watering. In 1920 he sold the property to Mr. DeHaven, and told him the history of the shrubby little tree.

Year after year Mr. DeHaven watched the slow growth of the little tree, but made no special effort to encourage it, for he had not tasted jaboticabas in Rio. Then one day in the spring of 1932, when the little tree had just come of age and was a good six feet high, he was surprised to observe fruit on the ground under it. You will recall that the flowers are produced on old wood, even very large
limbs, instead of out at the branch tips, and so the flowering and fruiting had easily escaped observation until some ripe fruit fell. Thereafter the tree received careful attention to fertilizing and was watered during dry periods, and it has made considerable growth in the past six years. Rather heavy applications of commercial fertilizer and of both stable and poultry manures have had no other effect on the tree than to encourage new growth and more fruiting.

Since its first fruiting, the DeHaven tree has borne a crop or two every year, and as it gained in size and vigor it has become almost everbearing. Like the related Eugenias, the jaboticaba matures its fruit in less than two months from the flower, and so in 1938 it was possible for it to set six crops of fruit. The first bloom is in February each year, and when there have been several crops, this one and the one from April bloom have been the heaviest. This year the tree is already carrying its second crop, and the first crop yielded 20 quarts.

It will be noted that this tree has survived the freezes of 1917 and 1934 without appreciable injury at temperatures down to 24° F. However, it should be remembered that it was unusually well situated for protection from cold in 1934, and the evidence does not really permit us to consider it as more hardy to cold than the litchi, and perhaps not more so than the mango. Certainly it can be expected to thrive anywhere in Florida where these fruits can be grown, and that gives us quite an extensive range of territory. Popenoe states that it can be grown anywhere from sea-level up to 3,000 feet of altitude, if it is not too cold, and thus altitude should not be a handicap in Florida.

The recent account by Dr. Fairchild, to which I have referred, enables me to make two additions to his excellent account of the jaboticaba in 1936. That note did bring to light another tree, for a single one of the plants raised from the seed collected for the United States Department of Agriculture in Brazil by Dorsett, Shamel and Popenoe in 1914 is still surviving in the Chapman Field Plant Introduction Garden. It is F. P. I. No. 37838, and was transferred from the Buena Vista Garden in 1925 and set out at Chapman Field in 1928. Now twenty-five years old, it is only seven feet high, but that is of size and age that it can be expected to bloom now anytime. It was introduced as "jaboticaba de cabinho" which is Myrciaria jaboticaba, closely related to the true jaboticaba, M. cauliflora.

Of further interest for adding to the 1936 account is the information as to the source of the trees at the "Kampong." They came from seed sent in 1921 by Mr. B. F. Humicutt, then teaching in the Agricultural College at Lavras, Minas Geraes, Brazil, where Professor Rolfs has lived so many years now.

At the Sub-Tropical Station we made a number of attempts to import seeds and grow plants of the jaboticaba. Several times we obtained seed from Cuba, where some of the 1914 introductions have long fruited, but the delay for routing them through Washington for treatment was such that the seeds were always dead on arrival. We also made importations directly from Brazil, and finally obtained a few small plants from seed sent from Sao Paulo. They were less than a foot high at three years of age, and proved to be very delicate children, but some of them are still alive. We also obtained a few plants from a man in California who had imported seeds successfully.

When Sr. Joao Dierberger, the leading nurseryman of Southern Brazil visited South Florida with the Rolfs in 1936, I learned that he could supply grafted trees of the best varieties of jaboticaba. But the difficulty of getting them through the quarantine treatment alive was too great to make it desirable for us to attempt to introduce them. It is my understanding, however, that the Office of Plant Introduction of the United States Department of Agriculture has now imported some of these choice grafted varieties. I am informed by Mr. DeHaven that his tree has supplied a considerable quantity of seed to provide stocks for propagating these fine varieties, and in another ten or twenty years we may be able to report tasting fruit from the best varieties of this favorite Brazilian fruit. Meanwhile we rest assured that the tree can be grown and fruited in South and Central Florida.