

LOQUATS

Mrs. Isabelle Krome, Homestead

From the morning in late September when a spice-laden breeze drifts in announcing that the trees are in bloom until that sad day in April when careful search reveals not a single remaining fruit, loquats command my affectionate interest. A minor part of this feeling comes from annually-revived memories of a series of springs spent in the wind-swept tops of the neighbor's loquats. Those were unusually tall trees. I thought they were fifty or sixty feet high, and I have not dared to go back and look at them since childhood lest I find only every-day loquat trees. The view from their branches was glorious and inspiring—and so was their fruit! Whatever the stature of the trees, I am positive those were the best "Japan plums" that ever grew. One tree, the tallest, bore a fair-sized white loquat with only one seed. It was shockingly acid until absolutely dead ripe and then one fruit was worth ten of the others. The White Loquat was stingy. The rest bore good crops of medium to very large fruit, with orange-colored flesh, about like Victor.

It would be interesting, to me at least, to know where those trees came from. Condit, who did a lot of research before publishing his Loquat Bulletin, did not find out when they reached Florida. The 1867 Annual Report of the U. S. D. A. mentions their being here then, and the trees in which I lived in the early nineties certainly were all of thirty years old. Many fine old seedlings are found in the northern part of Florida, where their beauty and the fragrance of their cream-and-white blossoms are appreciated though fruit seldom matures. When Winthrop Packard was here, enjoying the experiences that later we were to share in "Florida Trails," he became acquainted with the loquat as he loitered along the St. Johns in November. He wrote "One of the sweetest of Southern trees at this time of the year is the loquat, which is not by right of birth a Southern tree at all, being transplanted from Japan. However, the loquats have been

here long enough to be naturalized and seem Southern with that extra fillip of fervor which marks, often, the adopted citizen. Their odor was the first to greet me on landing at the long dock at Orange Park, floating on the amorous air with sure suggestion of paradise just beyond."

Ryerson says that the bloom stands 27-degree weather without injury. So in usual winters the fruit will ripen over a large part of the peninsula. In spite of a temperature of 26 or 27 degrees in December, 1934, we had a heavy crop at Homestead in the spring of 1935. From Gainesville south, at least a few bearing trees are found in every community and the total count should be fairly impressive. Aside from seedlings, budded trees of named varieties have been disseminated by at least three Florida nurseries for many years. George Cellon was selling in 1910, perhaps earlier, plants of the fine loquats which C. P. Taft originated in California. Pineapple and Victor trees which Mr. Krome got from Cellon in 1910 are still bearing though somewhat battered by storms. In addition to these two we have Champaign, Early Red, Advance, Thales, Tanaka and Oliver. Seedlings of Advance have grown to bearing size beside the parent tree, and produce as good or better fruit. Five years ago David Fairchild gave me budwood of a large brilliant-orange loquat of such quality and beauty I have had to grant it first place upon my list of favorites. In response to a request for the story of the Oliver, Dr. Fairchild wrote me last week:

"What I have done with the loquat has been merely to pick up as many of the good sorts as I could wherever I traveled abroad. These varieties, most of them unnamed seedlings from Malta, Zante, Algeria and Sicily. I did get from Tanaka himself budwood of his large fruited variety which bears his name and from Mr. Arkwright the collection of his named varieties listed in our plant inventories as 6453-6460, sent in by Swingle in 1901. This collection contained one called the Olivier, 6457, with which George W.

Oliver, the propagator of the Bureau of Plant Industry worked in the greenhouses in Washington.

Among the many crosses which Oliver made between this Olivier and the Tanaka, 48 were selected as worthy of being fruited out. These were sent to the West India Gardens in Altadena, California, in 1908. The West India Gardens were owned by Wilson Popenoe's father, F. O. Popenoe, as you recollect. I do not know whether a complete collection of "Oliver's Loquats" was sent to Miami or not. Presumably it was. The collection sent to the West India Gardens was disappointing as I recall, and I do not think a single variety was preserved there. In the Miami Gardens one variety, or rather seedling, did unusually well and Simmonds called it to my attention and I worked a scion of it into an old seedling loquat tree that stood behind our house here on the Kampong. This must have been about 1918. The 1926 hurricane destroyed the tree in the Brickell Avenue Garden and I found myself in possession of the only tree of this seedling—the only one left of the Oliver crosses between the Tanaka and the Olivier.

Since I held Oliver in high esteem because of his excellent work and since so far as I know the Olivier had disappeared from cultivation, I decided to give my tree the name Oliver. I worked some buds of it on seedlings after it fruited on my place and appeared to be of unusual size and excellence, and I now have two trees which are in good health notwithstanding the fact that the 1935 hurricane blew them both over. It is not possible for me to justly compare this variety with Advance and Trabut, both of which are growing on the Kampong, because the Oliver trees are better located than are the other trees. As things stand here, though, it is the best loquat I have on my place.

Of the early spring fruits here the loquat certainly deserves our most serious consideration. It fruits best I think on the off-season; i. e. those when the springs are cool and wet and the mangos fail to set their fruits. My family look forward to the loquat season with expectation and my guests are always enthusiastic about them *when they are fully ripe*. Loquat tarts and loquat pies

are simply delicious. We have them every spring and consider them more delicate than apple pies."

Dr. Fairchild's reference to pies gives me an excuse to include here a recipe for the Homestead brand. If followed exactly a delightful gustatory experience is assured. Scald large, ripe fruit, remove skins, seeds and membrane around seed cavity. Put three pints of fruit in baking dish (depth of fruit about three inches). Add two cups of sugar in which is mixed a rounded tablespoon of cornstarch; two tablespoons of butter and a sprinkling of cinnamon. Put pie crust over top (there is no bottom crust), and cook in 350-degree oven until crust is golden brown. This takes about half an hour. Too long cooking ruins the flavor. Serve hot or cold. Do not add any water to the fruit. Loquats are over eighty per cent. water.

From a money-making standpoint there isn't much to be said for loquats. A characteristic which prevents successful distant marketing, and greatly hampers local sales, is that the fruit must become absolutely ripe before it is picked or it will be too acid to eat out of hand. If left on the tree until it reaches this stage, it drops off the stem at a slight touch and within an hour or two has begun to deteriorate. A dark bruise follows immediately upon the least rough handling. My conviction that loquats primarily are intended to be eaten *in* the tree or under it, holds until a variety that ripens satisfactorily after picking comes to light.

It is probable that the reason California has not been more successful in marketing in the East is this inability of loquats to develop sugar after they are gathered. In an article in the Los Angeles Times three or four years ago W. L. Jackson, of the Federal-State Marketing Service, gave some surprising figures upon the amount of fruit raised in California. In 1929, he said, Los Angeles consumed the equivalent of sixteen carloads and in 1932 nine cars were sold in New York before the demand fell to a point where the returns were in red ink. Their plantings reached about fifty acres several years ago and have not been increased since.

If one wants to learn all that is authentic regarding history, propagation, varieties and cul-

tural methods, Condit's Bulletin 250, published in California in 1915; Popenoe's Manual of Tropical and Subtropical Fruits, 1920, and Ryerson's The Loquat in California, issued in 1925, are available. To the person whose interest isn't so keen, I may say that its future is more important than its past; propagation by side grafts upon year-old seedlings gives good results; Advance is still one of the best varieties, and all a loquat asks in the way of care is the treatment accorded other fruit trees in its vicinity. We do not spray.

Those who have given thought to better loquats for Florida believe there are great possibilities for improvement through planting seeds of good varieties. If a half dozen experimenters would set out rows and rows of seeds from trees where there is a chance for cross-pollination, and care for the plants until they bear, this improved fruit might appear shortly. The Subtropical Experiment Station is the only place where this is being attempted, as far as I know, and the planting there is on a small scale. What improvement does the loquat need? Not in flavor, perhaps. There is a pigmy in our grove which puts to shame any other for sheer deliciousness. If a helpful bee would aid in developing a loquat with the exquisite taste of this St. Augustine seedling, the size of California loquats

as described by Popenoe, and the one small seed of my old-time White Loquat—then throw in for good measure a texture which would tolerate commercial handling—that would be a *very* nice fruit.

In order to bring from hiding superior loquats now growing in Florida and to see if we can better our present best, I have in mind forming a Loquat Society, the only requirement for membership a pledge to plant a loquat—it may be a seed, seedling or a budded variety. The important qualification is an enthusiastic interest. The first regular meeting might be held in March, 1940, and thereafter at five-year intervals. Until our first meeting I am willing to be the secretary unless someone else wants the position. We need no treasurer as there will be no dues. All members must exhibit loquats, and a committee composed of Dr. Fairchild, Norman Reasoner and the secretary will judge those shown at the first meeting. The member whose loquat is voted best shall be president of the society until 1945. The member whose exhibit is best that year succeeds to the presidency, and so on. While an important objective is the development of larger and finer fruit, the Society will be assured of lasting fame by adopting as its goal *a loquat tree for every child to climb*.

THE BULL HORN ACACIA

A TREE THAT WILL BEAR WATCHING

David Fairchild, Coconut Grove

Three years ago I visited as Mr. Armour's guest on the Utowana, the island of Old Providence. It is a small island belonging to Colombia and called by the Colombians the Isle de Providencia. It is situated 150 miles east of the coast of Nicaragua and 250 miles north of the Isthmus of Panama. The buccaneer Morgan once lived on it and three of the old cannon with which he fortified it are crumbling to fragments on a promontory that overlooks its chief harbor. As evidence of the races which were gathered there by Morgan and his followers a strange mixed population now inhabits the island. There are

some of Swedish and others of British and still others of Spanish descent.

The hills rise behind the village of Fresh Water Bay where we landed and on the March morning they appeared to broil in the tropical sunlight.

I engaged Leonardo Newball to go with me back into these hills to see whether there might be some plant or other worthy to be introduced into Florida. No sooner had we left the village and begun to climb the narrow rocky path that led back into them, than I found myself surrounded on all sides by growths of the Bull Horn Acacia. I had seen this species of extremely thorny tree