

N.C. Peaches May Thrive Above This Ground Cover

What grows under a peach tree has a good bit to do with what grows in the tree, researchers at North Carolina State University and Clemson University have found.

Indeed, scientists have learned that the presence of a grasslike plant on the floor of peach orchards helps discourage insects and other pests that can damage peaches and lower the quality of the fruit.

Researchers have known for some time that certain weeds tend to harbor peach-damaging insects. The presence of these weeds in orchards contributes indirectly to lower peach quality, said Dr. John R. Meyer, an entomologist in NCSU's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. But scientists didn't know what to recommend in place of weeds.

As Meyer put it, "We knew what we didn't want on the orchard floor, but we didn't know what we do want."

Now, however, a study by scientists at NCSU and Clemson has revealed a promising candidate, a grasslike plant called nimblewill. Nimblewill looks like grass, although it is actually a sedge, a family of weedy plants.

In fact, nimblewill seems almost too good to be true, at least as a ground cover for peach orchards. Said Meyer of nimblewill, "It

looks like it's got everything you want. It shows promise as a ground cover in apples and Christmas trees also."

The thing nimblewill doesn't do is provide comfortable lodging for insects that can damage peaches. It was because of the tendency of insects to set up housekeeping in weeds like henbit, chickweed and cress, which are often found growing on orchard floors, that Meyer and Dr. Eldon I. Zehr, a Clemson plant pathologist, looking for alternative ground covers.

Among the insects that thrive in such weeds are so-called catfacing insects such as stink bugs and tarnished plant bugs, Meyer said. These insects disfigure peaches, leaving a scar on the peach that some believe looks like a cat's face. Disfigured peaches are useful only for processing, and processing centers are too far from North Carolina to make shipping profitable. Disfigured peaches are useless to North Carolina growers.

Mites also live in weeds, and when the weeds dry up in the summer, the mites migrate upward into the trees. Meyer said mites defoliate the trees and spin webs that make the peaches difficult to pick. While they don't have a direct impact on peach quality, mites can dim the vigor of a tree. The result

can be a lower yield the next year.

Then there is ring nematode. Nematodes are microscopic parasitic worms that live in the soil. They seem particularly to like the area around the roots of weeds. Meyer said the ring nematode is thought to be "a principal player in peach tree short life syndrome."

Researchers do not completely understand short life syndrome, which causes trees to die for no apparent reason four to six years after being planted.

Weeds can be killed fairly easily with herbicides, and ridding an orchard of them has been shown to reduce insect damage significantly, Meyer said. But the alternative to ground cover, bare ground, has drawbacks.

There's more erosion and the soil compacts more easily, Meyer pointed out. Water doesn't penetrate compacted soil to reach the tree roots as easily as it does in looser soil.

And there's a greater temperature fluctuation in the soil, which is not good for the trees. The soil heats up and cools down more quickly when the ground is bare.

No wonder that Meyer and Zehr began two years ago looking for a ground cover for peach orchards that would be more compatible with the trees. They planted trees

in bare ground and in plots where weeds were allowed to grow and compared these plots with plots of trees planted in various other ground covers.

"Absolutely phenomenal, the difference between those plots," said Meyer. In some plots, such as those in which fescue grass covered the ground, there was 40 percent tree mortality. The presence of these ground covers, which clearly are not desirable in peach orchards, apparently contributed to the deaths of trees.

Then there was nimblewill.

Nimblewill, which grows to a height of 4 to 5 inches, is drought tolerant and does not represent significant competition for peach trees. Neither mites nor catfacing insects find nimblewill attractive, so it appears likely there will be fewer insects in nimblewill orchards. And fewer insects would mean growers could reduce insecticide usage.

Nimblewill may even have what is known as an allelopathic effect on ring nematode, Meyer said. Allelopathy is the tendency some plants have to produce substances that are poisonous to animals or other plants. If nimblewill is even able to discourage nematodes, it would seem too good to be true.



AUTHOR KNEW MISERY—Richard Wright, the author of "Native Son," "Black Boy" and five other novels and short story collections, knew the taste, smell and cool deathlike careers of misery. His first 18 years were spent in constant struggle, often near starvation, often in fear of beating that would wipe out his breath. Inexplicably, Wright rose above this harsh existence and became the nation's first successful African-American novelist.

COOKING OIL

FDA Approves Coconut Oil

Endorses Tropical Oils in Normal Diets

(NU) - The health effects of various fats have become a matter of intense interest — and controversy — as the nation has gone on an anti-cholesterol binge.

In fact the recently retired U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. C. Everett Koop, thinks the cholesterol issue is over emphasized. He says "the cholesterol bubble is about to burst."

There is no doubt, though, that there is validity in urging Americans generally to reduce their caloric and fat intake. The problem comes when some nutritional advisers start to draw a line between fats without differentiating between those in animal products and those in vegetable fats such as coconut oil.

Generally unknown is that the Food and Drug Administration has given coconut oil and the other tropical oils a green light as used in the normal American diet.

Polyunsaturates and Cancer

Also some pseudo nutritionists in blanketing saturated fats as bad fats would switch consumers away from all saturated fats without refer-

ence to long standing scientific reports, recently confirmed by researchers at Cambridge University in England that polyunsaturates pose a risk of colon cancer.

Similarly, consumers have been led to believe that when saturates are replaced by partially hydrogenated oils they are getting a more healthful product. The fact is that the hydrogenation process increases the normal saturates and adds saturate-like trans fatty acids to oils.

Still another oddity in the fats picture, also not generally known, is that when bakers and other food processors switch away from the tropical oils because of the unsupported claims that they contribute to cholesterol build-up, they substitute domestic oils such as soybean oil which contains more calories than the tropical oils.

Dr. Mary G. Enig, research associate in the Department of Chemistry and Bio-chemistry at the University of Maryland, reported recently that the substitution results in an increase of 4.6 to 5.6 percent in calories. X

Routine Helps Workers Leave Job at Front Door

Some people bring home work from the office in a briefcase. Others bring it home in their minds. If you find worry about work consuming your free time, you may want to set up a routine designed to help you make the break.

Dr. Leo Hawkins, human development specialist at North Carolina State University, suggests selecting one of the following routines to ease the transition from work to home:

- Take a walk, go jogging or ride a bicycle. Walk the dog. Work out at a health center.
- Take a quick shower.
- Rest for a few minutes.
- Talk to a friend, but not about work.
- Work in the garden.
- Listen to your favorite music.
- Escape for a while into a good book.

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