

Experience with Honeycrisp



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I do have some experience and a few definite opinions when it comes to Honeycrisp. I live in Frankfort, Michigan, some 150 miles north of Grand Rapids. My brother Mike and I first planted Honeycrisp in 1995 with 1000 whips. We now have nearly 9% of our apple acreage (13 acres) planted to Honeycrisp and are holding. I will briefly outline what I feel are this variety's strengths and weaknesses and then conclude with what I believe needs to happen for this apple to become a long-term winner.

The first characteristic that sets this apple apart is the texture. As most of you know, it has a crispness unlike almost any other variety. The flavor, which was first described as "mild," is excellent and quite intense when properly matured in our orchards. After eating a good Honeycrisp and then trying a Gala or Swiss Gourmet, the latter two seem exceptionally bland. The apple sizes easily. If not overcropped (thinned properly), the fruit quality is normally quite consistent. The name Honeycrisp and the unique look (bi-colored, almost fluorescent pink-red) of the apple are both great marketing tools. Finally, if you can get around scald and/or rot problems, storage life is outstanding. We have held fruit at room temperature for more than a week with no appreciable loss of quality. I should mention that we have not had a problem with the "fermented taste" that has been reported in other sites around the country.

Now I must tell you of several weaknesses of this apple. The number one problem I have seen is the rot problem in storage. We have seen it show up within 6 weeks of harvest. Whether it is soft scald, black rot, ribbon scald, penicillium decay

or simply injury from low storage temperatures, we need a solution to the problem ASAP. Bitter pit is a common problem with this variety and we use calcium chloride with nearly every spray after petalfall. The tree is very susceptible to powdery mildew and potato leafhopper damage. It is susceptible to fire blight. If overcropped, fruit quality will suffer in the form of poor color and bland flavor that will not improve with more time on the tree. Even with proper crop load, we have had to multiple pick this variety in an attempt to get the best color. Lastly, Honeycrisp has a very thin skin and is easily punctured or bruised during handling.

I now offer three recommendations for the success of the variety.

- We must solve the scald/rot problem before large volumes are to be stored.
- Grow Honeycrisp only in quantity where you can safely grow a top quality (color) Mac. A market flooded with poor quality fruit will help almost no one. Thankfully, the northwest part of Michigan's lower peninsula seems to be prime location to properly grow this variety.
- Do not give the fruit away. We should grade hard and sell at a premium for as long as is possible. I must take a moment to commend Dennis Courtier and Pepin Heights for their philosophy on pricing and marketing. Any packer can move product if the price is low enough but those who strive to sell quality at a price that yields a good return to the grower are to be appreciated. Oh yes, they provide something that we don't see enough of these days . . . a complete, easy-to-understand pack report.

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