

Trends in Sweet Cherry Cultivars and Breeding in Europe and Asia

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“This article is one in a series of articles written for the Good Fruit Grower Magazine in 2005-2006 reporting on papers given at the 2005 International Society for Horticultural Sciences Cherry Symposium in Bursa, Turkey.

Public and private cherry breeding programs exist in a large number of old world countries, including Denmark, the UK, the Czech Republic, Romania, Estonia and Ukraine in Europe and Japan and China in Asia. Although, not specifically covered in this presentation the authors mentioned the importance of the cherry breeding programs in North America (especially Summerland, B.C. Canada) as an impetus to cultivar innovation.

In the last decade 120 new varieties have been released by breeders from Europe and Asia. Most of these varieties have one or more outstanding traits that make them noteworthy. In the last decade, average fruit size has improved from 6-8 g to 9-12 g and flesh firmness has greatly improved with the elimination of softer varieties as new, firmer varieties have taken their place. Over this period of time color has also changed with European breeders releasing varieties that are deeper red verging almost on black. Examples familiar to Pacific Northwest growers are ‘Regina’ and ‘Attika’. Asian breeders are tending towards a bright pinkish-orange blush over a yellow background. Due to relatively high rain fall amounts in late spring and summer throughout much of Europe, resistance to cracking has been a high priority among breeders with several new varieties exhibiting a cracking rate of only 5-10% even with heavy rains. Also notable has been the extension of the ripening window through the release of these new varieties. Ripening dates have been extended one week earlier and 2-4 weeks later than previously grown varieties.



Compact tree habit, once a high priority among breeders has been relegated to a secondary pursuit due to irradiation induced problems such as fruit size and yield reduction, but also because the success of dwarfing rootstocks has decreased the need to manipulate scion size. Similarly, breeding cherries that are resistant to the most important pests and pathogens, such as cherry fruit fly and bacterial canker, has seen little progress.

Despite the great abundance of new releases, especially from Europe, few of these have made their way to the U.S. The exceptions, as already mentioned, are ‘Regina’ and ‘Attika’. Others that may be of interest to Pacific Northwest growers include ‘Techlovan’ from the Czech Republic and ‘Alex’ from Hungary. Although currently in the U.S., several years of evaluation will need to be conducted to determine the potential of these later two cultivars for U.S. growers.