



She's apples: How colourful fruit has its place in art, literature and life



ONE OF the more unusual colloquial phrases used in both Australia and New Zealand has been “She’s apples” or “It will be apples”, referring to a state of satisfaction. It’s very similar in usage to “She’ll be right”, or “She’s Jake”.

It probably originated from the state of maturity of some plants, especially bulbs, which are said to be appled when they are full and round in shape.

Another suggestion is that it is from rhyming slang “apples and spice” for “nice”. The apple as a symbol has a substantial history stretching back to the days of Eden as the fruit of the tree of knowledge, represented widely in art and literature for centuries.

The history of the names of fruit varieties, that is, sports and cultivars, is a fascinating one – for some names have originated in whimsy, others are toponyms, named after an area or terroir, and still others after fruit breeders or those who are deemed worthy.

Others make no apparent sense at all and can lead to much confusion, examples being the apple names Cole’s Quince, Early Strawberry, Irish Peach, Pitmaston Pineapple, Pumpkin Sweet and Winter Banana.

The word “cultivar” is a blend of the words cultivated variety, being deliberately bred, while “sports” are foundlings or natural mutations happening by chance.

With at least 7000 apple cultivars in the world, tracing the origins of names could be prob-

lematic. There are competing claims on some etymologies and provenance, and some have several names.

I have grown and loved the name of an exceptionally large dessert or eating variety, Peasgood Nonsuch. In the 1850s 16-year-old Emma Manby of Grantham in Lincolnshire planted five apple pips and later, after she became Mrs Peasgood and moved with her trees to Stamford, her Peasgood Nonsuch bore fruit and fame.

The word nonsuch means incomparable, the very best, the term being applied to plants, people and places that have no equal. In the apple world, it has taken on an additional sense for an apple that is used for both cooking and eating.

Some apples invite being eaten by their very names, particularly the heritage or heirloom varieties with their evocative labels. Sops in Wine is one of these, but we might hesitate before biting into a Keswick Codlin or a Leather Coat. Foxwhelp, Geeveston Fanny and Hoary Morning are likely to have a quaint genesis, while Bloody Ploughman and Slack ma Girdle will definitely have a story to tell.

Tallow Pippin? Not for me: there are visions here of saturated fat. Fillbarrel, Kentish Fillbasket, and Hangy Down evoke images of laden trees, while Cheddar Cross and Hereford Redstreak give us a clue to location of origin. Several apples have duplicate names – Devonshire Quarrenden is known as Sack Apple; Black Gilliflower is

also called Black Sheepsnose.

Thoreau did not take apple names seriously. In 1862 he dismissed their implied claims: “I have no faith in the selected lists of pomological gentlemen. Their ‘Favorites’ and ‘None-suches’ and ‘Seek-no-farthens’ commonly turn out very tame and forgettable [sic].”

Frankly, I don’t have much time for Adanac – that’s Canada spelled backwards – while Freedom, Fortune, Holiday and Holly do nothing to tantalise the ears or the tastebuds. Then there are those ugly compounds and blends, such as Idared (yes, bred in Idaho) and Jonagold (a cross of Jonathon and Golden Delicious). The Portuguese are avid apple and pear growers, and they have applied names with gusto. In translation, they have Donkey’s Nose, and Ox Proboscis or ox nose, and their family of pears includes Nun’s Belly and Nun’s Thigh. The New Zealand cultivars Gala and Jazz just don’t match up.

In the United States, the term apple was adopted not just for Harlem, which became the Big Apple encompassing all of New York, but as a term for a Native American (Indian) who rejected his or her culture and adopted the values of white society. Such a person was regarded by those who used the term as red on the outside and white inside. It’s quite clear that apples have an established place in language as well as art, literature, the orchard and the table.



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How do you like them apples? Apples' names are as colourful as the fruit itself