

# Mr. Maslin's Fig Orchard Is A Wonder

And so it is likely to prove that our old friend Mr. E. W. Maslin, valuable public servant and a master of amateur horticulture, builded better than he knew, perhaps, when he indulged in a seedling fig orchard in Placer county nearly a quarter of a century ago. Dr. Walter T. Swingle, who is conducting life-history investigations for the U. S. Department of Agriculture, and who was first to land the fig insect in California by the Roeding route, is disposed to believe that some of Mr. Maslin's seedlings are wonders, and will make further study of them. Dr. Swingle gives this account of the Placer county plantation:

In 1885 Mr. E. W. Maslin planted the seeds of the best grade of Smyrna figs to be obtained in the market. Several hundred of these seedlings were set out in orchard form on his place at Loomis. This orchard was not a commercial success, and it was soon noticed that many of the trees were more like capri figs than Smyrna figs. In the fall of 1899 I found several promising capri figs there, and in the summer of 1906 Professor Mason found a very curious variety, a sort of hermaphrodite tree, that had enough of the qualities of a capri fig to support the Blastophaga (fig insect), and enough of those of the fertile fig tree to produce an abundant crop of summer generation buds just as the spring generation capri figs were ripening. It also bears numerous fertile seeds mingled with the insect-bearing galls. By planting this variety among the other capri figs the Blastophaga will be able to breed uninterruptedly throughout the year, and not, as is now the case, almost completely die out in midsummer.

**The Capri Fig Orchard.** —It is clear, from what has preceded, that the Blastophaga has a very much better chance of breeding in a special capri fig orchard composed of a number of varieties. Some sorts of capri figs not particularly valuable for use in caprification may, nevertheless, be extremely valuable in furnishing suitable breeding places for the insect at some critical season, as, for instance, the new variety noted above from Mr. Maslin's seedling fig orchard. Since March, 1908, I have realized the importance of securing all obtainable varieties of capri figs, and this object has been kept steadily in view ever since. A number of capri figs were secured by me in Naples in 1908, and others in 1899 in Algeria, Greece and Asia Minor, and in 1901 Mr. Carl S. Scofield made a special trip to the fig region of the Kabylie mountains of Algeria to secure the many capri figs that occur there. I secured some of the Italian sorts in 1902. In the mean time the Maslin seedling orchard has pointed out a way to obtain still more and ultimately still better sorts.

**New and Superior Figs and Capri Figs.** —There is nothing to indicate that the Smyrna type of fig is very highly bred or very widely different from the wild type of figs. On the contrary, among even the few dozen edible figs secured by Mr. Maslin there are several that are equal, if not superior, to the commercial Smyrna variety.

This being the case, there is every reason to expect to secure very superior varieties of drying figs and of capri figs by growing large numbers of trees from seeds of the best varieties pollinated by all the different capri figs. It must be remembered that the hereditary characters of the capri fig come into play in this breeding work, and that we might as well expect to improve the grade of Durham cattle with a scrub bull as to breed new and superior types of drying figs while using a poor type of capri fig. The hereditary character of capri figs can be seen only in the offspring, so we are forced to try as many different capri figs as possible in the hope of securing one that yields progeny of the highest order of excellence. This is another reason for securing all obtainable varieties of capri figs, as it by no means follows that the capri figs best adapted for artificial caprification on a commercial scale will be those yielding the best new sorts among their progeny.

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