

A Short History of the Seed Swap and Scion Exchange

By Jack Kertesz, MOFGA's Landscape Coordinator and founding member of the *Maine Tree Crop Alliance*

The Seed Swap and Scion Exchange is an event that was initiated and then organized for many years by the Maine Tree Crop Alliance. I can't recall exactly what prompted the initiation of the first scionwood exchange. I had just begun writing the *Maine Tree Crop Alliance* newsletter and a swap may have been part of that initial thrust to open up the idea of tree crops to the public. Our first event was held at the Forest Entomology Lab in Augusta in March of 1983. I had made an acquaintance with Clark Granger, an employee there who was interested in American Chestnuts, and permission to use the small space was granted rather quickly. We had about 40 people in attendance and well over 50 varieties - mainly apple - were made available. The following year the event was held at a church in Augusta, and then for a number of years we set up at Unity College.

In 1999, the event moved to the Exhibition Hall on the MOFGA grounds, and we teamed up with the Maine Seed Savers Network that same year. Fedco also became a supporter of this program, with Roberta Bailey and John Bunker providing enthusiasm and knowledge over the years. MOFGA has been organizing this event since that time.

The thinking behind this event has always been to share the wealth, and to let people freely join in the excitement of raising woody plants, no matter what their skill level or their ability to bring plant material. Hundreds of people have attended grafting classes at the event over the years, which initially were taught exclusively by Mark Fulford. There were other workshops in which the principal speakers were connected to UME Cooperative Extension and the ME Department of Agriculture, as well as other seed and tree fruit people, always presenting to appreciative audience members.

Many people made strong connections and pursued their horticultural pursuits knowing there were allies in this endeavor. Plant material has moved all over the region because of this exchange and I'd like to believe that it has had a positive impact. Recently I was saddened to learn that a very active organization in the Pacific Northwest, The Home Orchard Society, had met its demise. Early on, I drew inspiration from this kindred group. We have seen a steady interest in our event, at times reaching upwards of 600 folks in attendance.

As we enter the 39th round of swapping out scion wood, stories and sharing our excitement and inspiration, I can only hope that our local version rolls on. Learn more about the Maine Tree Crop Alliance [here](#) or [here](#).