

A Peach Isn't a Peach Isn't a Peach

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Plastic dogwood is passé. And so is polyethylene pyrocanthus and fake forsythia. In short, plastic plants are out and real greenery is in. There is a pronounced trend now away from the artificial and back to the natural.

What was a booming \$300-million business ten years ago has declined steadily as sales of plastic plants and flowers for the home have plunged. The season-proof synthetic forests that were moved into office buildings as the architects and contractors departed are being moved out in many places and replaced by live trees. It isn't simply that poly plants are no longer chic. Fashion everywhere is turning against the synthetic. The natural food explosion is matched by the natural fiber revival; today's designer clothes are all guaranteed to crush. The polyester pants suit is a symbol of out; wrinkled is the in look now.

But if nature is winning in the plant and couture worlds, it is losing in the things we eat. While wax fruit may be unacceptable, real fruit is more like a bad imita-

tion all the time, including the wax coating to make it look good. "Flavor is not a factor of primary interest to plant breeders," the chairman of the vegetable crops department at the University of Florida has candidly admitted. It is in the groves of academe, from coast to coast, that the groves of vulcanized produce are developed; the University of California has given us the rubber tomato. This is a classic case of breeding to specifications of durability, not taste.

Nor is consumer preference a factor; consumer acceptability is the criterion. Acceptability means that the consumer buys the product because he has no choice, short of a hunger strike. Wooden apples become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The breeders say the consumers can't tell the difference, but it is the professors who seem unable or unwilling to distinguish between cherry tomatoes and marbles, between peaches and yellow cotton batting. Once all flowers and fruits brought the scent and savor of the seasons. If a poly rose no longer smells so sweet, can there be hope for nectarines?

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