Fearless Fruit: Time to De-’cide’
Review by Keith Johnson

MICHAEL PHILLIPS
*The Holistic Orchard: Tree fruits and berries the biological way*

A CONVENTIONAL ORCHARD is a war zone. Terrorizing enemies abound in the forms of insects, viruses, and fungi (oh, my) which threaten to ruin yields and all must be prevented (by killing them) from carrying out their agenda of destruction and economic sabotage. A witch’s brew of pesticides, herbicides, rodenticides, nematocides, bactericides, and fungicides are used in most commercial orchards as growers struggle to produce blemish-free (and nearly nutrient- and flavor-free) fruit-like objects for market. The EPA reports that the national total for pesticide use in the US is a billion lbs/year.

Poorly-informed people, trained by corporate-dominated media, assume that if a fruit looks good it must be good. But, in ever greater numbers, smart citizen shoppers are beginning to question the safety of their foods and the environmentally pernicious practices used to beget the deluge of monocropped commodities once known as food.

Folks who want to grow their own fruit are often told that it’s impossible to get a decent crop without poisons and that they’d be better off leaving it to the “experts.” Well, the so-called experts are mostly idiots when it comes to ecological understanding of complex systems, so it’s with deep and grateful relief that I opened the pages of Michael Phillips’ latest book in which he begs to differ with the assertions of the chem-addicts (his previous book *The Apple Grover* should definitely be included as a must-have addition to your library). Not only is it possible to grow fruit organically but doing so opens up relationships with a mesmerizing macro- and microcosm of benevolent friends and allies dedicated to our mutual fulfillment.

I tell everyone who wants to garden to grow healthy soil as their first, and perpetual, crop and that by doing so success is inevitable. I say, it’s not a ‘green thumb’ you’re looking for but a black thumb, one that mirrors the ever-deepening dark of humic carbon-rich earth, teeming with life in a dazzling array of diversity...and Michael offers a similar message.

He tells us that you’ll “discover a core part of your being, that place where humans find happiness and meaning as we embrace our rootedness on this precious planet.” That works for me, and it’s what I regularly recognize in our home forest-garden-of-Eden where biodiversity is the rule. I don’t garden to make a couple people feel contented and well-fed but to satisfy, also, the needs of TRILLIONS of supportive organisms. If they’re happy, I’m happy and all the plants and animals share the sentiment.

In the late 80s, I had the delightful opportunity to live for a few years in the “Lost Valley” region of northern New Hampshire as a neighbor and joined Michael in the orchard care, pruning, and finally pressing of the apples into a nectar of juice made all the more ambrosia-like by the inclusion of some wild apples which are ubiquitous in the region. Many communal meals with Michael, his wife Nancy, family, and friends made my time
What soon becomes clear is that the organisms identified by the toxic chemical growers as pests, are in fact, simply food...