



NEWSLETTER

JUNE 1990

**TAMPA BAY CHAPTER of the
RARE FRUIT COUNCIL INTERNATIONAL, Inc.**

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(INCLUDING RENEWALS)

MEETINGS ARE HELD THE 2nd SUNDAY OF THE MONTH AT 2:00 P.M.

NEXT MEETING JUNE 10, 1990

MEETING PLACE HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY AGRICULTURAL BUSINESS
CENTER. (COUNTY AG. AGENTS' BUILDING, SEFFNER)
Take I-4 to Exit 8 South, S.R. 579, go past
traffic light at U.S. 92 intersection.
Building is less than 1/2 mile on left (east)
side of U.S. 92. Use parking lot. Meeting
room is in rear of building. Main door will
probably be locked. Walk around.

PROGRAM JOHN STANG OF THE BLUEJILLION CORP. NURSERY
in Winter Haven will speak on the fabulous
blueberry, the origins and culture thereof,
and uses for the ripe fruit. John may be
bringing some blueberry plants for sale for
those who might be interested in trying
their hand at blueberry culture.

We will also have our tasting table and
request assistance from the membership for
the creation of mouth-watering goodies.

The plant raffle and library table will
also be in evidence.

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"TROPICAL FRUIT WORLD"

Fairchild Tropical Garden is publishing a new journal called "Tropical Fruit World". It is beautiful, and full of information. The last issue was on lychees and longans. Subscriptions are \$15.00. (Tropical Fruit Program, Fairchild Tropical Garden, 11935 Old Cutler Road, Miami, FL 33156)

NATURE TRAIL SAFARI

Tom Economou is leading a fruit and flower safari to Costa Rica, August 18-25. For more information, call Tom at Nature Trail, Inc. (305) 285-7173.

* * *

A GUATEMALAN SAFARI by Gene Joyner

The Christmas freeze wreaked havoc with tropical fruits all the way south in Florida as far as Miami and Homestead. In Guatemala, of course, they don't have to worry about the cold. They can grow tropical fruit year round because the temperature never gets below about 65 down in the low elevations, although they get freezing temperatures in the mountains close by.

From June 9 to June 15 of this year, Gene Joyner will be taking a safari back to Guatemala and he still has some openings for anyone who might be interested in going to Guatemala for a week. Guatemala is very mountainous and has about seven active volcanos, although Gene doesn't go into the area where the volcanos are. But you will be able to see them off in the distance from your hotel room. The flight is out of Miami. It's about two hours to Guatemala City and the travel will be on DC-727's or 737's American made planes, and most of the crew are Americans.

Guatemala has a population of about 2 million people and sits on a plateau surrounded by mountains, a very beautiful area. Guatemala's central market is about 120 acres, right in the middle of the city. The temperature averages about 70 to 75 degrees with a cooling breeze blowing down off the mountains nearly all of the time. Guatemala is a modern city but much of the architecture is influenced by the Mayan and Aztec Indian architecture. Also, there are very many little parks and squares scattered throughout the city to provide small green areas and a place where people can go to relax during the day and enjoy the greenery. In the older parts of the city are many beautiful churches and old quaint buildings that lend their atmosphere to the city, reminiscent of Spain and Mayan cultures.

There are several horticultural gardens in and about Guatemala City with statues, fountains and a lot of ornamental plants and palms. The group will travel in a tour bus and the bus schedule and route is entirely up to the group. It is completely unregulated and the group can stop whenever they want, at markets and other points of interest. Market places are crowded with people and have innumerable small stalls selling everything imaginable, on the streets, on the sidewalks, everywhere, all kinds of merchandise intermingled. They do not separate the merchandise into areas such as fruits and vegetables and straw market pottery, etc. but one stall may be pottery and right next to it may be vegetables, so it is real difficult to find what you're looking for and takes a lot of searching. For the best opportunities, one needs to get to the market very early because they open at dawn and if you're late getting there, the better stuff will be sold out.

Gene had many slides of the fruit and other things in the markets. The pineapples were piled up in an unbelievable number, the largest pineapples you can imagine, for about a quarter apiece. There were lots of coconuts with the vendor opening them with a very few whacks of her machete. You can drink the coconut milk if you wish, can crack them open and eat the flesh. All types of bananas, red, yellow, and in great bunches. Peaches brought down from the highlands, and pears, lots of very high quality watermelons, lots of citrus, although the color is very poor, mostly green, because it takes the cool weather to color up citrus and they never get it in Guatemala. The quality of the citrus is still good, even though they don't color up. Lots and lots of carambolas, although most are green because the Central Americans seem to prefer them green rather than ripe. Tamarinds can be bought in the shell or already shelled and pressed into cubes and wrapped in plastic. It can be purchased in either form. Tamarinds are a favorite fruit and you'll find them in every market. Lots of mangoes but mostly small

and fibrous but still very sweet, not the quality that we are accustomed to here in Florida. Papayas - large numbers in large size and of excellent quality. Some get almost two feet long and eight inches in diameter. They are usually green on the outside but ripe on the inside, deep orange or almost red.

Gene showed us some of the more unusual fruit, like the red mombin or hog plum which again, they eat green and salted, and can be bought in the markets like that, green with salt. Also a fruit called nance, which is a little yellow fruit with a kind of cheesy flavor, not particularly appealing to the North American palate. There was also a mamey sapote, which is the most expensive fruit in the market.

He had more slides showing peaches, papayas, pineapples and a fruit called a green sapote, native to Central America. It is a relatively large fruit with normally a single seed and a flavor reminiscent of apricot, a very good quality fruit with a firm flesh. In Central America, the trees get to 80 or 90 feet tall, a very large tree, but they are very tender and can only be grown in the very southern part of Florida. We also saw a lot of vegetables, beautiful tomatoes, potatoes, onions, and husk tomato. Also one farmer had hot peppers spread out all over the street, drying in the sun, after which he will collect them and take them to the market. Sugar is sold in lumps, large blocks of raw sugar wrapped in leaves. The sugar is a dark brown chocolate color and at home when sugar is needed, a piece is simply broken off and used as needed and the rest is wrapped up and put aside.

Chickens and turkeys are bought in the market alive and trussed to keep them quiet. In one area of the market we saw various types of dried fish, minnows and dried shrimp, all sun dried and laid out for trade. Approaching this part of the market downwind, you can tell from a half mile away that you're getting close.

The markets also include pottery booths and straw products, probably some of the highest quality pottery and straw items in Central America and at prices that are very attractive. It's amazing that as backward as you might think the people are, they accept credit cards and some of the booths will ship pottery back to the United States for you.

He also had some slides of Antiqua, the ancient capital of Guatemala, which was settled in the 1700's and which Guatemalans consider a historic city. For this reason, they allow no modern construction, high rise buildings or modern architecture. Anything that is built in Antiqua must be built in the same style as the existing structures. It is a very picturesque city with cobblestone streets and Spanish architecture with arches and columns. Antiqua is surrounded by volcanoes, none of which are active at this time. If you look out from the city in any direction, north, south, east or west, you can see volcanoes rising up as high as 8,000 feet. The buildings are very beautiful, particularly the churches, most of which are Catholic churches and built by the Spaniards many years ago. The churches are very beautiful inside with their statuary and relief work, and lots of gold and silver work. The merchants in Antiqua are similar to those in Guatemala City but tend to have more temperate fruit because Antiqua is at a higher elevation and the bananas and mangoes are shipped in from the lowlands. The vegetables in the market are exceptionally beautiful with extremely large carrots and excellent other vegetables. In the markets in Antiqua, there are stalls marketing handwoven cloth in very beautiful colors, jade artifacts and jewelry. There are lots of coffee plantations in the area of Antiqua at an elevation of 5,000 feet and it's said to be some of the best coffee in Central America. Coffee grows better in the shade of other trees and they frequently use the Inga or ice cream bean as a shade tree because it grows so rapidly and so large. They Inga trees are kept pruned to produce the proper amount of shade and the coffee trees are topped at about six feet of height to make the picking of the coffee beans more convenient.

May Plant Drawing:

| <u>PLANT</u> | <u>DONOR</u> | <u>WINNER</u> |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Yellow Passionfruit | Frank Honeycutt | Monica Brandies |
| Yellow Passionfruit | Frank Honeycutt | Bruce Pearson |
| Surinam Cherry | Frank Honeycutt | Jules Cohan |
| Surinam Cherry | Frank Honeycutt | Bruce Pearson |
| Plantain | Frank Honeycutt | Jules Cohan |
| Plantain | Frank Honeycutt | A & L Stark |
| Plantain | Frank Honeycutt | ????? |
| Fig | Charles Novak | Jules Cohan |
| Fig | Charles Novak | ????? |
| Jaboticaba | Bob Heath | Nancy McCormack |
| Rio Grande Cherry | Bob Heath | Monica Brandies |
| Orange Berry | Bob Heath | Charles Novak |
| Ficus coccolofolia | Walter Vines | Al Hendry |
| Hot Peppers | A & L Stark | Leo Cotter |
| Roselle | Monica Brandies | Bob Heath |
| Horned Melon | Frank Pupello | William Yedkois |
| Horned Melon | Frank Pupello | Jules Cohan |
| Horned Melon | Frank Pupello | ????? |
| Horned Melon | Frank Pupello | ????? |

HELP!!!! Is there an accountant or bookkeeper in our organization who can assist with an audit? If so, please contact Lillian Stark. Thank you.

May Hospitality Table:

Pearl Luxenberg.....Fruit Cake
 Nancy McCormack.....Pineapple Jelly Roll
 Arnold & Lillian Stark.....Guananabana, Guave, Passionfruit,
 and Tamarind Juices

Member Elinor Wilson would like to obtain information on the Philippine UBI she bought at our last sale. If you can provide information, please call her.

THE BEAUTIFUL, STAR-SHAPED, SWEET AND SOUR CARAMBOLA

by Tom Economou

When experiencing tropical ocean breezes of the sea level Caribbean islands of Jamaica and Trinidad, or the warm, low-lands of Guyana in northern South America, or the cool, middle-highlands of Costa Rica (3000 ft.) in Central America or the even higher and cooler, Andean mountains of Columbia (8,000+ ft.), you always find the beautiful, sour carambola (*averrhoa carambola* L.) for sale in the central markets of their major cities --Kingston, Port of Spain, Georgetown, San Jose, and Bogota. Sometimes called 'star fruit', 'five fingers', or simply, 'carambola'.

Over the years, I've explored the central markets of tropical America and found the carambola too sour to eat out of hand and poor in appearance in the market. I wondered why people bought these sickly looking, sour carambolas. I seldom purchased one except to find a sweet one. My tropical fruit safari groups that I took with me to the markets were fascinated by the star shaped fruit, but also found them sour. Even today, the carambolas one finds in the central markets of these countries are usually sour.

The carambola is best adapted to a lowland tropical climate with medium to high rainfall. (1) It's origin is Asia, and has been cultivated there for ages where the flavor is sweet to very sour. After many years, it has also been naturalized in South America (---and possibly in Central America and the Caribbean, too) where it was reported growing in the Rio de Janeiro Botanical Gardens before 1856.(2) Today, the largest commercial production is found in Malaysia and Taiwan. In the New World, Guyana is first and South Florida is second in production.

Prior to the mid 1970s, carambolas in Florida were only sour. They look beautiful in clusters on the tree's limbs, waxy gloss, golden colored from pale yellow to orange, uniquely-shaped with 5 ribs, and star-shaped when cut. In my Miami, Florida back yard, the 'star fruit' or 'carambola' as it's called in the United States, produces large quantities of fruit 2 or 3 times each year. The carambola tree produces fruits quickly, within 2 or 3 years if grafted and 6-8 years from seed. Usually, my sour, ripe fruit landed on the ground to rot away. In the past, hardly anyone sold or bought them in Miami markets. Some back yard growers used part of their fruit to garnish salads, meats and make drinks. Few sold fruit to the local grocer. It is an attractive, delicate appearing, back-yard fruit tree ---more a small, bush-tree in its early years (to 30 ft.), producing lots of beautiful star-shaped fruits. But the fruit was sour, and how much sour fruit can one use?

In developed countries, as the United States, no one has the need or the habit to prepare drinks even as simple as mixing fruit juice, sugar, and water. We're spoiled with all the

prepared juices/drinks in our super markets. After many travel years on my Nature Trail tropical fruit safaris, I found that Latins and Caribbeans had the habit of making drinks at home. The drinks are tasty, nutritious, and cheap to make with local back-yard fruits. I finally realized that sour tropical fruits such as tamarind (*tamarindus indica*), soursop (*annona muricata*), cas (*psidium friedrichstahlianum*, Costa Rica's favorite local drink), curuba (passion fruit/Columbia), maranjilla (*solanum quiyoense*), ambarela (*spondius dulcis*), cashew or maranon (*anacardium occidectale* - they use the false fruit, not the nut for juice), and Surinam cherry (*eugenia uniflora*), were local favorites for drinks and even ice cream. Most homes had some of these trees growing in their back yards. Drinks and ice cream were sold in local stores and also made at home.

In the lower Antilles, as in Trinidad and Tobago, and Guayana, the carambola is called 'five fingers'. It is made into a cool drink, but when sun-dried, cut-up, it is used as a substitute for raisins in a popular cake!

In 1976, the main home-grown cultivar was the beautiful, but sour 'Golden Star' which was brought to South Florida in 1936 as a seed from an established carambola cultivar of Hawaii.

(CONTINUED IN NEXT ISSUE)

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