



NEWSLETTER

JUNE 1993

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

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE: BOB HEATH
THERESA HEATH
ARNOLD STARK
LILLIAN STARK

PRESIDENT: SHERRY BAKER CHAPTER MAIL ADDRESS: 313 PRUETT RD., SEFFNER FL 33584
(INCLUDING RENEWALS)

MEETINGS ARE HELD THE 2nd SUNDAY OF THE MONTH AT 2:00 p.m.

NEXT MEETING: JUNE 13, 1993

MEETING PLACE: RARE FRUIT COUNCIL CLUBHOUSE, 313 PRUETT ROAD, SEFFNER. TAKE I-4 TO EXIT 8 NORTH, S.R. 579, GO ONE MILE TO PRUETT (STREET SIGN ON LEFT SIDE). TURN RIGHT (EAST), GO ONE MILE. SEE CLUBHOUSE ON LEFT IMMEDIATELY PAST McDONALD SCHOOL.

PROGRAM: WE WILL PRESENT A TAPED SHOW ON T.V. BY GIL WHITTON TITLED "CITRUS VARIETIES AND CARE". We will also have our usual raffle and tasting table.

Editorial

Volunteerism is alive and well at the Tampa Bay RFCI! Since the club began in 1978, our goals have been to educate anyone interested about tropical fruits and other "edible landscaping" and to encourage the cultivation and propagation of unusual fruiting plants. We are not a competitive garden club, but a group whose members share their knowledge, techniques, seeds, and plants with each other. Our activities reflect the enthusiasm with which we approach gardening. Even those members who are professional horticulturalists (have nurseries, farms, garden shops, etc.) participate for the many wonderful, albeit intangible, benefits club membership brings, not merely because they may benefit financially. We all learn from each other at meetings, activities, and through the newsletter about ways to improve our plants, new ones to try out, and what to do with all the delicious fruit we get. We enhance our excitement about succeeding at growing a difficult plant when we tell someone who knows just how hard it really was to do. We maintain our enthusiasm when we meet with others who share it also.

The primary function of Club fundraisers, such as the USF spring sale and the "Big Sale" in October, is to enable the club to continue its activities, such as monthly meetings with knowledgeable speakers, and the newsletter. It also is essential that our club raise sufficient funds each and every year to maintain the clubhouse and grounds. If we can do that, one day we will be able to plant and develop our plot into a lovely garden filled with all manner of unusual fruiting plants. What a delight that will be for each of us, and a way of educating others about the joys of our kind of gardening. It can be done, if we all continue to work together, and then we will all benefit as part of this great group. Each and every one of us is needed at the October sale, even if you don't have plants for sale (it is wonderful if you do, as many small plants are needed). No matter what your physical condition or abilities, there are a large variety of jobs that need doing at the October sale; one can be found to suit you. But if the entire membership doesn't participate in this activity, we will all lose out. Tampa Bay RFCI is only as strong as its membership's willingness to participate and to give of itself for the club's benefit!

BLUEBERRIES by Fred Strickland

Fred Strickland lives out near Plant City and he's been trying to grow blueberries since 1977. He was told by the experts that blueberries wouldn't do well this far south because all they were trying to grow were Rabbiteye blueberries. So he put in Rabbiteye blueberries and of course, they didn't work. He says he's probably killed more blueberry plants than anybody in this whole area. After several attempts, he progressed to the Sharp Blue High Bush blueberry, which was released in 1976 and which is the one that he is primarily growing at this point. When he started planting the Sharp Blue, things began to work, and about 6 years ago, he switched to drip irrigation and fertilizing through the irrigation system. That was a Godsend and if it hadn't been for that method, he said he wouldn't have been there today talking to us about blueberries.

Fred distributed a little pamphlet which he developed about 4 years ago with the help and cooperation of Dr. Paul Irene from the University of Florida. Dr. Irene is the plant breeder for blueberries and at that time, they were releasing the Misty 2-1 but they discovered it was not a very good blueberry. They found it was an extremely difficult plant to grow and suffered badly from dieback. Blueberries in general are not an easy plant. When people come to his place to buy plants, he advises them that probably 90% of them will fail in their endeavors. Growing blueberries is labor intensive. It requires a lot more fertilizer than the literature indicates and there are a lot of other problems associated with them, such as weed control, watering, etc. Just everything seems to go wrong with them, but once you understand the plants and their needs, and make up your mind that you're going to grow them, they are outstanding. For instance, he can grow a plant out of a mist bed to 3 feet tall in a year. The plants he put in the ground last May are chest high and the nice bunch of fruit which he brought for display were cut off of those year-old plants.

Fred showed us a slide which he just took of some of his blueberries. They have been picking for about a month and a half and the slide shows the second bloom. The first bloom was wiped out completely by the unnamed storm on the 15th of March because of the freeze that followed. He had about 10 times the fruit on the first bloom that was completely wiped out compared to what he has now, as indicated on the slide. But while the second bloom is low, he indicated that he would probably do alright because the price on the blueberries at this point is unbelievable. "It's better than growing drugs!" It's legal, but he's back in the woods off of a dirt road and when he comes out of the woods people say, "What's that guy growing down there?" Actually he's growing blueberries. He indicated that the best he's been able to do is \$70.00 for half of a flat, which holds 6 pounds of berries. This year they've started off at \$58.00 for a half flat and they're down to \$37.00 a half flat now. When blueberries start coming in from north Florida, the price begins to drop, but even at \$15.00 a half flat, he indicates he can still make money. So blueberry growers with Sharp Blue in this area have about 2 months lead before the market begins to drop to make their good profit. A half pint of blueberries in the supermarket weighs about 170 grams, which is about 6.5 ounces and sells anywhere from \$5.00 to \$12.00. He said, "I don't know who in the world would pay that price for blueberries; they're crazy, and I was born in this area, so I call them Yankees."

His berries go up north and they go overseas to Holland and Germany. But most go to Chicago, Boston and New York. Fred's plantings are not U-pick, and when people inquire about it, he tells them he still has to get market price. However, there are some U-pick blueberry plantings in the area and picking will be available for about another month. There are some people in the area who are growing Rabbiteyes which are an excellent fruit, but they're later than Sharp Blue and they do not make the money that the Sharp Blue makes. Fred says he's in the business to make money.

The next slide showed the Sharp Blue blueberry that Fred is growing. It was covered with pretty blue blueberries. Beside the Sharp Blue was a Rabbiteye bush with small green blueberries. The Rabbiteye is about a month behind the Sharp Blue. And while the Rabbiteye blueberries have certain advantages over the Highbush, like the Sharp Blue, they are later and he cannot compete with the Rabbiteye growers from Georgia and South Carolina which come in a month later. He is in the business to make money and the only way he can compete is to get his berries early. The Rabbiteye produces more fruit, is higher quality, has a thicker skin so it can be machine harvested instead of picked individually by hand; it has all the advantages except it isn't early.

Fred starts his blueberries with cuttings in a mist bed. He puts them in the field when they're about 12 inches tall, which is a recent development from the way he used to do it, which was planting much larger plants. The disadvantage of using larger plants is that they're much more susceptible to wind damage of the roots since they have a rather delicate root system that is very near the surface. The wind topples the plants and pulls up the root system before they have a chance to get properly rooted.

Fred showed us several slides of his mist bed, the little blueberries as they were originally growing, larger plants and the plants in the field. He grows his plants on plain Florida sand, a white silica sand which is typical for his area, and he provides his fertilizer in his watering system, being careful to note that blueberries take a lot more fertilizer than is normally indicated. The fertilizer he uses is a 12-4-6 with micro elements. The experts say you can't grow blueberries in the white Florida sand but Fred has proven them wrong; however, it does require an exceptional amount of fertilizer and water to maintain the plants, and it is necessary to continually monitor the pH.

He also showed us his drip irrigation system. Each dripper puts out two gallons per hour and he locates two drippers to the plant, which means four gallons per hour on each plant. In the event one stops up, the other one is normally operating and two gallons per hour over a six hour period is sufficient water.

To plant a blueberry in the ground in his soft Florida sand, he digs a hole about 2 feet in diameter and 18" deep, and fills it with a mixture of peat, pine bark and sand, and this is where he inserts his plants. The mixture gives the plant plenty of nutrients for 1 or 2 years. This planting medium has a pH of about 3.2 and this is sufficiently acid to keep the plant growing until it gets established.

As the blueberry plant grows, it puts up shoots which one might think are suckers, but are really the new growth of the plant and should not normally be removed. Fred puts about 1600 plants to the acre in the ground on 2 foot centers, 10 foot rows. He indicated that he has seen blueberry plants as much as 25 feet high but that he normally keeps them down to about 6 to 7 feet to facilitate picking. Fred showed us several slides of blueberry plants, mostly Sharp, and also a new experiment that he's presently trying. He has some blueberries 3 years old that are planted in half 55-gallon drums. These are blue, plastic drums cut in half with holes in the bottom. He uses a peat, pine bark, and sand mixture as the potting soil. From 450 plants in these pots with this potting soil, he can pick 30 flats; off of 1400 plants in the ground, he can pick 22 flats. So this gives you a good appreciation of the quality of the potting soil in the barrels. So from now on, this is the way he intends to plant all his blueberries. In addition to better fruiting is weed control, watering and fertilizing, since all of the water and fertilizer goes into the

Thank You Thank You Thank You

To: Monica Brandies for donating copies of her latest book to the club for sale. To all the members who worked at the USF Botanical Garden Plant Sale: George Riegler, Al Hendry, Gerald Amyot, Bob Heath, Tony & Sharon Gricius, Charles Novak, Paul Zmoda, Frank & Alice Burhenn, Bob & Sherry Baker, John Jenkins, Lillian Stark, Al Roberts, Janet Conard, KaiKai Chang. The sales success was due to all your efforts.

What's Happening

May-June 1993

by Paul Zmoda

Currently the Downy Rosemyrtle (*Rhodomyrtus tomentosa*) is showing off it's spectacular display of flowers. They are a bright pink and fade to pale pink after a day or two. These blooms resemble wild roses and the flowering period is quite long. If not grown only as an eye-catching ornamental, you will be well rewarded by the tasty berries later. The fruits look like small, brownish, down covered guavas having a persistent calyx. The inside of each berry is a pleasing raspberry color and the flavor is very good. You may eat them out of hand, or make a jam with them. This plant is easy to grow. It likes a slightly acid soil and good sunlight. It is fairly cold hardy and has been known to become an "imported weed" species in south Florida and elsewhere.

The giant blooms of *Passiflora alata* and *P. quadrangularis* may or may not set fruit of it's own pollen. Try pollen from *P. caerulea* for better results. The fruits of the former get quite large for passion fruit and have very good flavors. In addition, the rinds can be eaten. May through the rest of spring and summer is an excellent time to experiment with pollination of your passion flower species. Hand pollination is highly recommended because:

- ☞ Native insects may not be up to the task on these often-imported specimens.
- ☞ Hand pollination ensures larger, more filled out fruits.
- ☞ When conditions are unfavorable, such as rainy days, you can still have pollination occur if you protect the flowers with plastic bags for at least 1 to 2 hours.
- ☞ You can better your odds of setting a rare fruit that require a cross with another species, especially if you have only a few flowers to deal with.

Many of the fruiting plants we try to grow will respond well after the application of an acid fertilizer. Follow mixing directions and apply around the root zone. Plants that are yellowing and slow growing may perk right up. Two spanish limes, also called Quenepe or Momoncillo, (*Melicocca bijugata*) appeared dormant since last fall. One application of Miracid fertilizer and new shoots reached an amazing 19 inches in less than two weeks!

Message from the President:

Volunteers: Janet Conard would like some help on our hospitality committee. If you would like to help, give her a call at 239-9246.

Did you know some of our members made over \$100 for themselves and RFCI? How? They brought plants they had started themselves and sold them at the USF Plant Sale! With a little work and desire, you too can join their ranks at the RFCI sale on October 16 & 17 at the Fort Homer Hesterly Armory. You've heard how much fun we have and the great buys you can get in the rare fruit plants you want-but remember you can make money too! Enough money can be made for a night on the town, part of a vacation, or more plants- what a deal. One of the many benefits available to you as an RFCI member.

Raffle: May

Plant Name	Donor	Winner
Java Plum	Charles Novak	Fred Friedman
Java Plum	Charles Novak	Mabel Galbreath
Java Plum	Charles Novak	Samm Philmore
Java Plum	Charles Novak	Diane Friedman
Persimmon seedling	Al Hendry	Bob Baker
Persimmon seedling	Al Hendry	Al Jean
Ground Cherry	Heath	Stark
Wampi	Armando Mendez	N. McCormack
Macadamia	Bruce Beasor	Diana Mills
Banana	Bruce Beasor	Scott Daniels
Celeste Fig (2)	Honeycutt	Diana Mills
Celeste Fig	Honeycutt	Lynn James
Celeste Fig	Honeycutt	Charles Novak
Grapefruit clone	Honeycutt	J. Van Der Hoek
Carissa Natal Plum	Honeycutt	?
Oranges	Max Means	Samm Philmore
Roselle seeds	Max Means	?
Luffa squash	Zmoda	L. McKone
Luffa squash (2)	Zmoda	??
Snake gourd	Zmoda	Yuku Tanaka
Snake gourd	Zmoda	Alexander Argiry
Snake gourd	Zmoda	J. Murrie
Snake gourd	Zmoda	
Pasiflora alata	Zmoda	Heath
Surinam Cherry	Zmoda	Bob Baker
Surinam Cherry	Zmoda	?
Peruvian Guava	Philmore	Mabel Galbreath
Sago	Philmore	?
Yellow Passion fruit	Philmore	Alexander Argiry
Brown Turkey Fig	Philmore	K. McKone
Romaine lettuce	Philmore	?
Red Bliss potato	Philmore	Rome Vaccaro
Surinam Cherry	E. Freedman	Diana Milla's
Surinam Cherry	E. Freedman	Alexander Argiry
Chayote	Rome Vaccaro	Jin Murrie

Tasting Table: May

Janet Conard: Friendship Cake

Al Roberts: Papaya Juice

Pat Jean: Peanut Butter & Sugar Cookies

Nancy McCormack: Muffins & Danish

Diane Friedman: Banana Bread

Blueberries, continued:

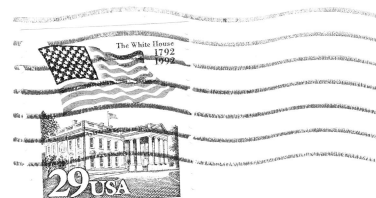
soil where the roots are growing. Also, the base of the plants is up 2 feet above the ground which allows for hand weeding and makes for much better weed control. The potting medium is 2 parts peat, 1 part pine bark and some sand to fill it out and keep it loose. He has tried pure peat but it tends to compact, stay wet and rot the roots. Likewise, when he fills the drum and puts the plant in it, the potting soil is filled to the rim initially because there is some compaction that occurs over time and the soil surface tends to drop. The potting mix he uses is called Tree-Mix, which he buys directly from a supplier.

Fred indicated they pick 30 flats a day from the 450 blueberry plants in the drums. That comes to one flat every three days from five plants (for those who are thinking about growing some in their own yard).

Fred also tried grapes and apples on his acreage and produced plenty of nice fruit but couldn't sell it. People just aren't willing to pay for it, they don't want it. So he ripped everything out to plant blueberries. In pots there is the cost of the plant, which is maybe a dollar and a half, the cost of the drum, which is about \$3.00, about a dollar for the peat in the drum, and he has about \$0.25 in the irrigation system, which brings the total cost of each plant to about \$6.00.

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