RFCI NEWSLETTER MAY 1999 99-27

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

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE: BOB HEATH, THERESA HEATH, ARNOLD STARK, LILLIAN STARK

PRESIDENT: CHARLES NOVAK

MEETINGS ARE HELD ON THE 2nd SUNDAY OF THE MONTH AT 2:00 PM.

NEXT MEETING: MAY 9, 1999

MEETING PLACE: MEETING WILL BE HELD AT SAME LOCATION AS SEPT. MEETING AT THE UNIV. OF SOUTH FLORIDA, BUILDING # BSF 100.

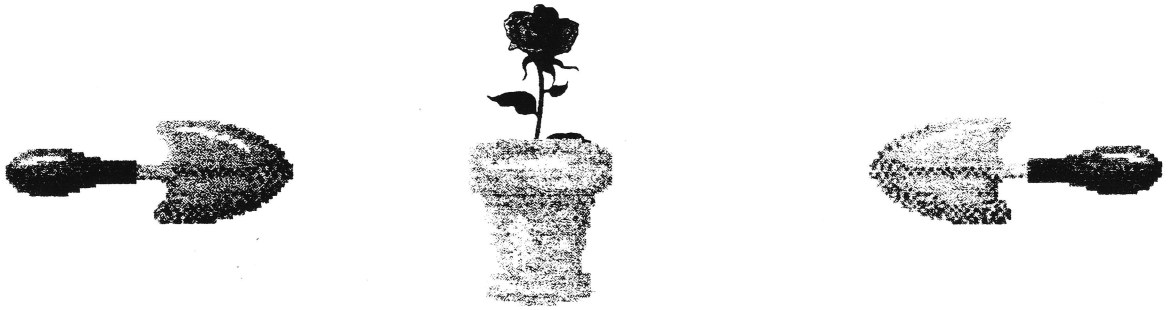
PROGRAM: OUR SPEAKER THIS MONTH WILL BE OUR GOOD FRIEND FROM THE PALM BEACH COUNTY EXTENSION SERVICE, GENE JOYNER. Gene's visits to our meetings are always enjoyed by our members, to allow for renewal of long time friendships. Gene is a knowledgeable authority on tropical fruiting trees and will be providing a slide presentation of tropical fruiting plants suitable for growing in the Tampa Bay area. He will also be available to answer questions and to identify plants if you have questions that need answers or plants that need identifying. Also, we will have our usual tasting table and plant raffle. Please contribute. All in all, it should be an exceptionally interesting meeting, so we expect to see a large crowd. We know it is Mothers Day and we suggest that members bring their mothers or children, as the case may be. All mothers will be given a plant.

**Thank you Thank you Thank you**

To all members who worked at the USF show and sale. Your efforts made it a great success.

## Growing Fruit Crops in Containers[1]

Larry K. Jackson[2]



At the USF sale, many questions were asked concerning the growing of tropical fruit trees in containers. A World Wide Web search found a number of sites of interest to club members:

Master Gardener Notebook: http://hammock.ifas.ufl.edu/txt/fairs/19977

Florida Plants Online: http://www.floridaplants.com/growing.htm

The article on growing fruit crops in containers, which we are reprinting here, is just one of many available at these sites. If you don't have access to the web at home, try the public library (most have computer access), or, if you are a computer novice, ask a club member for help. There is a wide world of information available to you for the asking.

# Growing Fruit Crops in Containers[1]

People frequently want to grow some types of fruit trees in containers, because of poor soil, improper climate or lack of sufficient space. Fortunately, a wide variety of fruit trees can be grown in containers with some degree of success. However, such plants will rarely be as attractive or grow and fruit as well as those grown under optimal conditions in the ground.

One of the principal reasons for growing fruit plants in containers is portability. Thus, tropical and subtropical fruits can be grown in containers in areas where freezes might occur. The size and mobility of the containers allows the plants to be moved indoors during periods of damaging temperatures. This does not mean, however, that temperate zone fruits can be produced in subtropical areas, because these fruit trees require a certain amount of cold weather each winter in order to grow properly and produce fruit.

Many fruits which can be successfully grown in containers are listed in Table 1. It is by no means complete, as most fruit trees could be grown in containers if the size of the container were not a problem. Most will produce some fruit if given proper care.

Containers may be plastic, metal, clay, ceramic, wood or any others normally available at nurseries and garden supply stores. Used whiskey barrels cut in half are excellent or wooden boxes may be built to order. The container should have adequate holes at the bottom for drainage of excess water.

## POTTING

The drainage holes of the container may be covered with pieces of screen mesh to prevent the soil from washing out. A (1-2 in) layer of gravel should be placed in the bottom of the container to facilitate drainage.

Most commercial potting soils should be suitable for growing fruit trees. However, a mixture of 1 part sand, 1 part peat and 1 part bark, perlite or vermiculite will also serve quite well. The potting medium should be loose enough to permit adequate but not excessive drainage.

Examine the root system of the plant. If it is pot-bound or has experienced severe root crowding in its previous container, judiciously prune some of the larger roots and loosen others to facilitate root proliferation in the new container.

The container should be partially filled with soil (large containers should be filled at the site where they are expected to remain). Place the plant in the partially-filled container of soil to its correct planting depth which is the depth at which the plant was previously grown. The final soil surface should be 1-4 in. below the rim of the container, in direct proportion to container size, to allow for watering.

(continued on page 99-29)

1. This document is Fact Sheet HS-57, a series of the Horticultural Sciences Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: April 1994.
2. Larry K. Jackson, Professor, Citrus Research and Education Center, Lake Alfred, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.

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MEMBERSHIP DIRECTORY... We will be printing the new membership directory this summer. Please send any name, address, phone or Email changes to the Club mailing address right away.

Complete filling the container and firm the soil around the plant. Water thoroughly but do not fertilize until new growth commences. An attractive mulch of bark, gravel or other material can be added to improve the appearance of the container.

## LIGHT

Most fruit crops grow best in full sunlight, but some will do well in partial shade. However, plants grow in direct proportion to the amount of light received, if other conditions are optimum, so container-grown fruit trees should be placed where they will receive maximum sunlight.

It is important that rapid changes in light exposures be avoided, *i. e.*, plants growing in partial shade should not be suddenly exposed to complete direct sunlight. Any plants that are to be grown indoors part of the year should be acclimated by gradually reducing the light to which they are exposed for 2-3 weeks before moving them inside and vice versa for plants being moved outdoors. Such acclimation is not necessary for plants that are to be moved indoors for a few days during freezes.

## TEMPERATURE

Tropical and subtropical fruit trees cannot tolerate freezing temperatures for very long. Some will be killed back to the soil by mild freezes while only small twigs will be killed on others. Some root damage can occur because the root system is not as well insulated from cold in a container as it would be in the ground. Cold hardiness depends on the plant, the care it receives and many other factors. Protection from severe cold is essential for all tropical and subtropical fruits growing in containers. Plants may be covered temporarily with blankets, paper or other material as protection against hard freezes, but such materials should be removed each morning to allow the plants to take full advantage of incoming solar radiation. Plants moved indoors during cold spells should be placed away from drafts caused by doors and heating ducts.

## WATER

Most container-grown plants that do not thrive are usually in poor condition due to faulty watering practices, usually overwatering. Plants growing in containers should be watered only as needed. The frequency of watering depends upon such variables as type and size of plant, type and size of container, temperature, humidity, potting medium and others. For most plants, the upper surface of the soil should be allowed to become dry to the touch before watering. Then water thoroughly by slowly filling the container. Good drainage of excess water from the containers is essential.

The soil in plastic, metal and ceramic containers generally stays wet longer than it does in wood or clay container, which allow water to evaporate through the sides. Cool weather generally slows plant growth and thus reduces the plant's need for moisture, so watering should be less frequent during cool weather.

## FERTILIZER

Good nutrition is essential for the success of container-grown fruit trees, but excess fertilizer can result in overgrowth, poor fruiting and possible dieback due to salt accumulation. Water-soluble fertilizers are widely available and should be used according to label directions. If mature foliage is a deep green color in most plants, adequate fertilizer is being used.

Many fertilizers can be used successfully, provided they are complete and balanced. The fertilizer should contain nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium in balanced proportions and should include lesser amounts or traces of magnesium, iron, manganese, zinc and copper. The ingredients and quantities of each nutrient contained are listed on the fertilizer label.

Salt accumulation may sometimes be a problem and is often indicated by a white crust on the soil or container and may be due to excess fertilization and/or water containing considerable soluble salts. Should this occur, the container should be thoroughly leached by slowly running water through the container for several minutes. This will carry excess salts down through the soil and out the drainage holes.

## PRUNING

With few exceptions, fruit trees will develop and maintain their natural shape with little or no training or pruning. They will occasionally become "leggy" when grown indoors or in poor light for too long. Leggy branches should be partially cut back to force branching and bushiness.

Frequently, the top will grow rather large and begin to exceed the capability of the root system.

Consequently, some leaf shed and twig dieback will often occur. Such plants should be pruned back heavily to rejuvenate them. When plants are heavily pruned, less fertilizer and water will be necessary to compensate for the reduced plant size.

## FRUITFULNESS

Most fruit crops will produce fruit in containers, given time, good care, and adequate size and age. However, naturally large fruit trees will require larger container to bear much fruit, as the amount of fruit produced is proportional to the plant's size, so large yields should not be expected. Many fruit plants need to be quite large in order to fruit at all, so their size can quickly become limiting in containers.

Many fruit crops require the presence of pollinizer cultivars and pollinating insects, but such considerations are discussed in other documents dealing with specific fruits.

It must be emphasized that even under the best of conditions, fruit production in containers will not equal the quantity produced on trees in the ground, as fruit trees grown in containers are usually growing under sub-optimal conditions.

**Table 1.** Fruit crops which can be grown in containers.

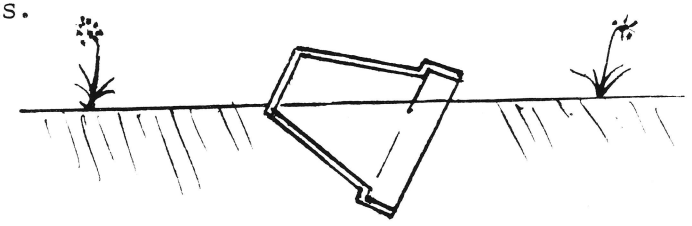
| Tropical Fruits | Citrus Fruits | Temperate Fruits |
|---|---|---|
| Avocado | Calamondin | Blackbery |
| Banana | Key Lime | Blueberry |
| Barbados Cherry | Kumquat | Fig |
| Capulin | Lemon | Strawberry |
| Carissa | Limequat | |
| Carambola | Tahiti Lime | |
| Cocoplum | | |
| Cattley Guava | | |
| Ceylon Gooseberry | | |
| Coffee | | |
| Grumichama | | |
| Guava | | |
| Imbe | | |
| Jaboticaba | | |
| Kei Apple | | |
| Limeberry | | |
| Miracle Fruit | | |
| Monstera | | |
| Naranjilla | | |
| Papaya | | |
| Passion Fruit | | |
| Pineapple | | |
| Pitomba | | |
| Surinam Cherry | | |

## INVITE A TOAD TO DINNER

You may have a voracious insect eating machine in your garden, especially if you have a pond or an area that's low and wet. The common American toad, Bufo Americanus, is a squat, plump Amphibian with rough, brown skin, bug eyes and a pale belly. He has bumps on his back that are toxin producing glands so irritating as to protect him from dogs and cats. One attempt to eat a toad will teach a dog to leave them alone.

Toads feast on many of the worst garden pests, slugs, cutworms, potato bugs. They appear slow and lazy but their agile tongues are sheer terror for bugs, zooming out, snatching bugs and bringing them into their maw. Toads usually stay in, sleeping during the daytime in a wet, shady place, coming out to eat at night or on rainy days. They usually breed in the spring and one may hear the high pitched grunt of the male toad near a pond or swamp. The female lays a string of eggs in water, which hatch into free swimming tadpoles or polliwogs. After a few weeks of growing in the pond, their legs begin to form and their tail begins to disappear. As the tadpoles develop into toads, they leave the pond in search of food and to find a friendly garden in which to live. To get long term tenants in your garden, one must create dim, moist spots where they can find shelter during the day. We use a gallon size clay pot partly buried in the ground as shown, to provide a house for toads, or one may buy a garden toad house from Plow & Hearth for $30.00. If a toad moves in, you can expect him to stay year after year for up to 10 or 12 years, which is the normal life expectancy for an American toad, all the time providing you with protection from garden pests.

Incidentally, warts are caused by a virus, not by our friend, Mr. Bufo.



From the President
Charles Novak

I want thank all club members who helped at the Spring USF Botanical Garden Plant Festival. The weather was perfect, though a bit on the warm side. There was a large crowd of plant enthusiasts on Saturday-not as many people on Sunday but we stayed busy all day. We sold many plants and fruit trees. We sold out of fruit juice (9 gallons) before noon on Saturday. Hopefully, we will have a financial report available at the May meeting. Again, thank you for your hard work.

I hope our new club members will be able to join us at the May meeting. Gene Joyner always gives a very interesting and informative program on the growing of fruit trees. He has written many articles for publication in various magazines. Club members had the opportunity to tour his Unbelievable Acres Botanical Gardens in West Palm Beach in May 1995, and again in June, 1998. See the first page of this newsletter for directions to our meeting place on USF.

A reminder about a new section in the newsletter: If you have something for sell/ trade or would like to buy/trade for an item, you may submit the information to Bob Heath or to me (by mail or in person).

Also, if you are interested in helping with the newsletter please contact Bob Heath or me. We have such a great newsletter due to the efforts of Arnold and Lillian Stark and Bob and Theresa Heath (and they have been doing it for many years). Due to other commitments and time constraints Arnold and Lillian must give up their positions on the club's newsletter editorial committee. Bob and Theresa Heath will remain on the committee and Linda and I will help, too. If you cannot help in preparing the newsletter for publication perhaps you would like to submit an article for possible publication.

Several club members showed up Saturday. April 17, to help build a Butterfly Garden at the USF Botanical Garden. The rain stopped us from completing the garden the first Saturday. We couldn't really complain as the rain was much needed and we desperately need more.

The following is a list of scheduled programs/speakers:

| | |
|---|---|
| May 9 | Gene Joyner |
| June 13 | Debra Toyer-Growing Blueberries |

At the May meeting remaining club plants will be available to members at club cost. A very good deal!! Please bring your extra plants for the plant exchange and your favorite fruit dish for the tasting table.

There will be a board meeting after the club meeting.

# WHAT'S HAPPENING
## Apr-May 1999
## by Paul Zmoda

Those of our readers who pay state taxes and wonder where they go may be in for a pleasant surprise. A monthly newspaper that you can receive free of charge will become an important resource of all things agricultural as it has for me. I am referring to The Florida Market Bulletin. In this valuable government printing, you will find many items for sale as well as items wanted that you may have to sell. There are stories of agricultural interest such as the medfly eradication program, fish farming, new food crops and successful Florida farmers. Try their nutritious recipes and then update your calendar with meeting dates of various organizations for goat or ostrich farmers and our own big plant sales. There are headings for lots of buy/sell categories such as farm products, agricultural machinery, poultry, cattle, rabbits and others like seeds, plants and trees (my favorite). All the classified ads are placed for free. I fond my wood chipper and rototiller in this publication, as well as many fruit trees and seeds. To get on the mailing list, write to:

FLORIDA MARKET BULLETIN
545 EAST TENNESSEE ST.
TALLAHASSEE FL 32308
Phone 850-487-8000
Computer contact is: WWW.Fl-Ag.Com

I set up 30 new shiitake mushroom logs in late March. I used a warm weather strain and inoculated maple as well as oak this time. Blueberries are almost ready and I tasted a few surinam cherries. I started a new tobacco cultivar (Black Mammoth) and made quite a few grape and plum cuttings. We dyed some Easter eggs using natural colors from mulberries, onion skins and turmeric.

New plantings: passion fruits, Colombian blackberry, 'Kari' carambola, 'Breda Giant' medlar and many different beans.

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