



NEWSLETTER

JULY 2000

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

EDITORS: BOB HEATH, THERESA HEATH, CHARLES NOVAK, LINDA NOVAK, JIM LEE, SALLY LEE

PRESIDENT: BOB HEATH

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

NEXT MEETING: JULY 16

Please note that the July meeting date will be changed from the 9th to the 16th. This will allow us to accommodate a trip to Homestead FL for the annual Mango Festival and the Fruit & Spice Park exposition, which is scheduled for July 7, 8 & 9.

MEETING PLACE: UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA, Building #BSF100

PROGRAM: Our good friend Ray Jones of the Sarasota RFCI will be speaking on members of the Eugenia family, which includes plants such as Surinam cherry, cherry of the Rio Grande, grumichama and many, many, many others. This is probably the most extensive fruiting family with very tropical all the way to temperate plants. We will get information on some of the common members and some of the more obscure members of the family. We will have our usual tasting table and plant raffle. Someone will need to take Janet Conard's place selling tickets and calling out the winners, as Janet will be unable to perform this very important function. Please volunteer. A new policy on the tasting table will go into effect at the next meeting. All members who bring something for the tasting table will get a free raffle ticket, which is the least we can do for the generous participation of our many bakers.

Tasting Table: June 2000

Novak: White sapote squares, Blueberry cheesecake, Blueberry jam, Fruit punch

Janet Conard: Pear upside-down cake

Thom Scott: Pineapple chunks

Paul Branesky: Durian wafers

Musgraves: Blueberry cheesecake

Chung: Blueberry Buckle

Kimberly Hunt: Brownies

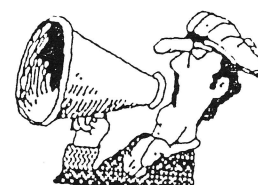
Creighton: Watermelon

Lillian Smoleny: Fruit salad

Thank You!!! Our tasting table is Great!!!

Members Corner

FOR SALE - CHEAP! Sunbeam Charcoal Grill - has vents top & sides, a cover & 4 legs. Good condition. \$30.00 Call or leave message. Edith Freedman 813-884-1144



JUNE PLANT RAFFLE

Plant	Donor	Winner
Blueberry	Charles Novak	Hunt
Blueberry	"	M. McCourt
Cas	"	?
Akebia	"	Creighton
Tamarind	Bob Heath	?
Surinam Cherry	"	Shane Smith
Papaya	"	Sheri Page
Pineapple	"	T. Scott
Eugenia Confusa	"	Jim Davis
Red Passion Fruit	"	?
Brown Turkey Fig	"	Sheri Page
Sugar Apple	"	Shane Smith
White Mulberry	Al Roberts	Sue Owen
Flower (purple)	Branesky	Dee Davis
Rainbow Pepper	"	Phil Brown
Tamarind	"	Susan McAveety
Lady Finger Banana	R. San Luis	Delores Davis
Avocado	N. Smith	Pauline Chung
Hot peppers	Stark	?
Avocado	Lee	?
Papaya	"	Delores Davis
Calla lily	"	Creighton
Banana	"	Jim Davis
Philippine Sage	Polly Shewfelt	Cheryl ?
Morning Glory Shrub	Sharon Pilot	?
Heather	"	Sheri Page
Heather	"	Bill Adrian
Heather	"	Bob Heath
Guava	Sue Deven	Hunt
Papaya	"	Delores Davis
Guava	?	Sheri Page
Coffee Arabica	Marilyn Weekley	"
Celeste Fig	?	Lillian Smoleny
Lady Finger Banana	R. San Luis	Sheri Page

NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

The USF Botanical Gardens had their 2nd annual Butterfly Fair June 10 & 11, and we understand from Brad Carter that it was a great success, with bigger crowds than last year. The weather certainly cooperated and while it rained in other parts of the area, the rain held off in the Gardens both Saturday and Sunday. On Thursday, June 8, our club put up the butterfly tent and put several hundred butterfly plants inside for the butterflies, which were released on Friday in the tent. Brad Carter, Al Roberts, Jimmy Lee and I worked for several hours to get the tent in shape. One of our new members worked harder, I believe, and longer than the rest of us. Her name is Susan but we failed to remember her last name. She needs to come forward and re-introduce herself because the club needs this kind of worker. We wish to thank the members who worked.

We wish to remind the membership again that the date of our July meeting has been changed from July 9 to July 16 because several members will be in south Florida for the tropical fruit weekend, July 7, 8 & 9. We will have a report on the festivities in the next newsletter. Our chapter donated \$100 to help pay for the authorities who will be speaking to us during these 3 days.

Following is a list of scheduled program speakers:

- July 16 Ray Jones of the Sarasota Rare Fruit Council.
- Aug. 13 Bert Bradish, a master gardener at the Extension Service. She will be talking on container gardening.
- Sep. 10 Dave Palmer of the Pesticide Retail Nursery & Landscape Co. He is a commercial urban horticulturist and will be speaking on pesticides and pest control.

Please donate plants for the raffle and food for the tasting table.

There will be a board meeting after the club meeting.

BLUEBERRIES

by Fred Strickland

Fred has been growing blueberries commercially on his farm for about 24 years. He showed us a variety of slides depicting the evolution of blueberry culture on his farm. He originally planted his blueberries in the ground, which was the common way to do it at the time, about 3 feet apart, in rows about 10 feet apart. This kind of blueberry culture has a lot of problems with irrigation, weeds, fertilizer and soil pH. So recently he progressed to half barrel containers of approximately 25 gallons, and then to 15 gallon pots, which appear to be ample for growing each blueberry plant. With a 15 gallon pot he's able to grow 3 to 4 times as many blueberries per acre as when he planted them in the ground. Weed control, irrigation, fertilizing, pH and soil conditions are much easier to control in 15 gallon pots than in the ground. It was interesting to see the many, many rows of pots lined up on his farm. Fred grows all his blueberries from cuttings in a soil-less mixture of Perlite and peat moss. After the cuttings are rooted, they are transferred to 1 gallon pots to grow out and then transferred to his farm or sold in his plant nursery. These are the ones he brings to sell at our tree sales at USF.

Fred specializes in two varieties of high bush blueberries, Gulf Coast and Sharpe Blue. These are the ones he has found do best in central Florida for early production in the spring. The blueberry bush goes into a semi dormant condition in the winter, sending up new canes in the spring, which are the fruiting canes for that year. When growing blueberries in central Florida for sale, it is critical that the crops are ready to be harvested early and get to the market before the blueberries from northern areas glut the market and prices drop.

The growing medium which Fred uses in his 15 gallon pots is 100% pine bark nuggets. In this case the pine bark is ground into individual particles no larger than 3/4" in diameter. This would seem to be an unusual medium for growing plants but it's ideal for the blueberry. Fred uses a form of drip irrigation and fertilizes with an azalea fertililzer of 12-4-6. He begins harvesting from the end of March to the middle of May. About every third year he cuts the plants back to 4 to 6" from the ground to permit a fresh start. By cutting back the plants he gets bigger berries the next year, fewer but bigger, and of course the big berries are the prime berries and bring the best price, which is the name of the game.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

Jun-Jul 2000

by PAUL ZMODA

We have needed to irrigate all of our fruiting plants often during this ongoing severe drought. We haven't lost any specimens, but some appear extremely stressed by the time it is their turn under the hose.

Kumquat "Meiwa" and "Sunquat" are blooming profusely now. If we can endure until the summer rains take over, we should see a heavy set of these small citrus fruit.

True tea plants, *Camellia sinensis*, are setting some seed pod. Air layered tea branches are being potted up for future use in a hedge planting. Local wild Flatwoods plums (*Prunus umbellata*) are ripening their cherry sized orange-red stone fruits. These trees are remarkably drought resistant and attractive. The fruit flavor is bitter/sweet and meaty enough to make preserves or sauces.

Out in the wilds, I made some air layers of yellow mayhaws. These hardy xeric fruit trees produce lots of miniature apple-like fruits that feed wildlife or can be used to make an outstanding jelly.

Our sorghum crop is looking good. The tall tassels are filling out well with plump seeds. These are to be used like popcorn when cured.

We are harvesting Daikon radishes as needed. Large, thick, white and crisp, these roots are real taste treats. I've taken to pickling them for future use. We think "April Cross" is a real winner. After they are pulled from the earth, I wash and then store them in the refrigerator. After a month or two, the hot taste is tamed quite a bit. Raw, cooked or preserved, these Oriental radishes are one of my favorite vegetables.

We are also putting up pickles made from cucumbers, onions, peppers and the fat seed pods of certain Asian radishes.

New plantings: Anasazi and chori beans, tomatillo, sesame, amaranth - all from seed.

LYCHEE *Litchi chinensis*

Origin: The lychee is native to low elevations of Southern China. Cultivation spread over the years through the neighboring area of southeastern Asia and offshore islands. It reached Hawaii in 1873 and Florida in 1883.

Culture: Lychees require seasonal temperature variations for best flowering and fruiting. Warm, humid spring is best for flowering and fruiting development. Cool winters with low rainfall are ideal for lychees. The trees become more hardy as they age. Mature trees have survived temperatures as low as 25°F when fully hardened off. Young trees may be killed by a light frost.

LYCHEE, continued

Growth habit: The lychee tree is handsome, dense, round-topped and slow-growing with smooth, gray, brittle trunk and limbs. Under ideal conditions they may reach 40 feet. The tree in full fruit is a stunning sight.

Foliage: The leathery, pinnate leaves are divided into four to eight leaflets. They are reddish when young, becoming shiny and bright green. Lychee trees have full foliage and branch to the ground.

Flowers: The tiny petalless, yellowish green flowers are borne in terminal clusters. Lychees are eye catching in spring when the huge sprays of flowers adorn the tree. Flowering precedes fruit maturity by approximately 140 days.

Fruit: The tree is covered by a leathery rind or pedicarp which is pink to strawberry red in color and rough in texture. Fruit shape is oval, heart shaped or nearly round, 1 to 1-1/2" in length. The edible portion or aril is white, translucent, firm and juicy. The flavor is sweet, fragrant and delicious. Inside the aril is a seed that varies considerably in size. The most desirable varieties contain atrophied seeds which are called "chicken tongue". They are very small, up to 1/2" in length. Larger seeds vary between 1/2 and 1" in length and are plumper than the chicken tongues. There is also a distinction between the lychee that leaks juice when the skin is broken and the "dry & clean" varieties. In some areas lychees tend to be alternate bearers.

Soil: The tree needs a well-drained soil that is rich in organic matter. A soil pH between 5.5 and 7.5 is acceptable, but plants grow better with a pH at the low end of this range. Apply a thick layer of organic mulch to the soil after planting.

Irrigation: The lychee will not tolerate standing water, but requires very moist soil, so water the tree regularly when it is growing actively. The trees are very sensitive to damage from salts in the soil.

Fertilization: Young trees tend to grow slowly and many gardeners tend to give them too much fertilizer in an attempt to push them along. Young trees should receive only light applications of a complete fertilizer. Mature trees are heavier feeders and should be fertilized regularly from spring to late summer. Use fertilizers formulated for acid loving plants. Chelated iron and soil sulfur may be necessary in areas with alkaline soils.

Pruning: Prune young trees to establish a strong, permanent structure for easy harvest. After that, removing crossing or damaged branches is all that is necessary, although the trees can be pruned more heavily to control size. V-shaped crotches should be avoided because of the wood's brittle nature.

Propagation: Air layering is the most common method of propagating lychees because grafting is difficult and seedlings are not reliable producers of quality fruit. To grow a plant from seed it is important to remember that seeds remain viable for no more than a day or two under dry conditions. Young seedlings grow vigorously until they reach 7 or 8" in height. They may stay at this height for a year or two without further noticeable growth. Wedge and bud grafts are possible, but seldom used.

Pests and diseases. Mites, scale and aphids occasionally infest lychees. Birds are often attracted to lychees, eating both the immature and the ripe fruit. It may be necessary to cover the plants with a protective netting.

Harvest: The fruit must be allowed to ripen fully on the tree. Overly mature fruit darken in color and lose their luster. The flavor lacks the richness associated with a certain amount of acidity. To harvest, snip off entire fruit clusters, keeping a short piece of stem attached. Lychees can be stored for up to 5 weeks in the refrigerator. They can also be frozen or dried. Lychees will begin to deteriorate within 3 days at room temperature.

LYCHEE, continued

Cultivars:

Brewster: Large, conical or wedge shaped red fruit with soft flesh. Slightly acid with fully formed large seeds. Commercial crop is Florida. Mid-season fruiting. Large, vigorous, upright tree.

Mauritius (Kwai Mi): Ripens early. Medium size, slightly oval, reddish brown fruit. Firm, good quality fruit. Tends to have chicken tongue seeds.



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