

NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2001

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

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PRESIDENT: JAMES LEE

WEBSITE: www.rarefruit.org (Charles Novak)

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

NEXT MEETING: APRIL 8

MEETING PLACE: UNIV OF S FLORIDA Bldg BSF 100

PROGRAM: Our program this month will not include a speaker. Instead we will be substituting a hands-on grafting & air layering work shop conducted by our club experts. We will split up into small groups for more personal instruction sessions and members are invited to bring their own root stock & scion wood for grafting. We will have our regular tasting table & plant raffle after the grafting sessions. Please contribute.

The USF Spring Plant Festival is scheduled for the weekend after our meeting, which, unfortunately, is the Easter weekend. We will be participating & all members are invited to help & to bring plants to sell. Parking is free but admission is \$2.00, for which the club will reimburse workers & participants in the sale. This is an interesting affair & well worth the \$2.00 admission. Likewise, it is a social event as well as a money maker for the club. We desperately need workers so let's make this sale a big one. Please join us.

* U.S.F. Spring Plant Festival *

The RFCI will be participating in the USF Plant Festival on April 14 & 15, 2001. This is an important fund raiser and all members are invited to attend, to assist in the Sale, to sell plants, to enjoy the camaraderie and to visit other groups.

Our participation will begin around 1:00 Friday afternoon, April 13, raising tents, setting up tables, arranging plants & posters, til about 6:00 pm.

On Saturday, April 14, the Gardens will be open at 7:00 am for our final preparations.

The front gate will close at 8:30 am Saturday & Sunday, and participants will have to enter by the side, south gate after the front gate closes, until 9:00.

From 7:00 am til 9:00 am on Saturday & Sunday, traffic will be one way, in the front gate & out the side gate. The Festival will end at 4:00 pm on Saturday & 3:00 pm on Sunday, and only after 4:15 & 3:15 pm respectively, will we be allowed to bring vehicles in to re-supply or remove plants.

Parking for participants not bringing supplies or plants is across the street from the front entrance to the Gardens.

The USF Botanical Gardens takes 10% of our gross sales; the remaining 90% will be split 70/20 between the participant & the RFCI, so mark your plants accordingly, remembering that you get 70% of the selling price, less taxes.

We have provided I.D. cards for RFCI workers. Only those with I.D. cards will be allowed in before the Sale begins. If you are refused admittance, someone from our group will vouch for you to gain your admittance. If you need an I.D. card, call Bob Heath @ 813-289-1068 in the evening. Price for admission without I.D. cards is \$2.00, reimbursed by the Club.

DIRECTIONS TO THE USF SPRING PLANT FESTIVAL:

Enter the Gardens from Bruce B. Downs one block north of Fowler, turn East on Pine Street, and Left at Alumni Drive. Go one block to the Gardens entrance.

STRAWBERRIES

by CRAIG CHANDLER

Craig Chandler works at the Dover Strawberry Research Center. We live in one of the most important winter strawberry production areas in the world. Florida is the second largest producer of fresh market strawberries in the United States. Strawberries are in the rose family along with several other important food crops; apples, pears, peaches, blackberries & raspberries to name a few. Strawberries are a perennial with a very compressed stem called a crown. From this stem grow the leaves & the flowers which produce the fruit. Also the stem produces horizontal runners or stolon. The runners grow out across the surface of the ground and at the end of each runner a new plant is produced, which is identical genetically to the mother plant. When the end of the runner lays on the ground, if moisture & suitable conditions exist, it will put down roots and produce another plant. This is the way new strawberry plants are propagated commercially. When a desirable new type of strawberry plant is developed, it is propagated through the runners and released to the growers, so commercial growers can get plants that are identical to the ones that were developed in the laboratory.

The strawberry fruit is an excellent source of Vitamin C with more Vitamin C per gram of fresh weight than oranges. Craig indicated that the only fruit he's aware of with a higher Vitamin C content per gram is the kiwi fruit. The strawberry fruit is also high in potassium and folic acid, which has been in the news a lot lately and is very important for women during pregnancy. It's also high in certain acids which apparently are anti-carcinogenic.

Strawberries are presently grown in every temperate and subtropical region of the world and even in some tropical countries where they must be grown at higher elevations, the mountains of central America and some of the mountains in Hawaii. Strawberries require mild weather in order to produce flowers and fruit; that is, temperatures between 50 & 80°F. The time from open flowers to ripe fruit is approximately 30 days, which can vary plus or minus a few days depending on the

weather. Most cultivars of strawberries are what is known as short day cultivars; they flower & fruit when the day length is less than 14 hours from sun up to sunset. In most parts of the United States the fruiting time for strawberries is only 2 to 3 weeks, except right along the coast of California & here in central Florida.

In central Florida we have days that are 14 hours or less for most of the year, but we normally fruit strawberries from late November thru April. We continue to get some fruit into May and even early June but the quality of the fruit tends to be poor. Even though we have day lengths that are suitable for flowering & fruiting, our higher temperatures in the summer, in effect, shut this flowering off. The ideal temperatures for flowering and fruiting of strawberries is between 50 & 80°F. Our temperatures thru our long summer hover around 90°. The day lengths along the coast of California are longer than 14 hours in the summer but they have ideal temperatures during that time so they can actually get some fruiting during the summer even though their day lengths are a little too long. In other sections of the country the day lengths are less than 14 hours but the temperatures are well below what would be ideal for flowering and fruiting so most of the time a strawberry plant will go into a somewhat dormant state. The flowers on strawberries in the northeast & midwest are actually initiated in the fall; the temperature drops and the plants go into the dormant state. Then in the spring when it warms up (the day lengths, though not ideal for flowering & fruiting) the plant will go ahead with flowers that were initiated back in the fall. This is why we get a short flowering & fruiting period in areas north of Florida.

Craig showed us some slides of the research center where he works. Strawberries are perennials but here in Florida we grow them as annuals. The plants are put in the ground normally in October and they will start to flower & fruit in November and will continue to fruit thru the winter and end the season near the end of March or early April. We could see the typical way growers grow

strawberries on raised beds covered with black plastic mulch. The slides showed 2 rows of plants one each raised bed with walking space between each bed. It is standard procedure to have a trickle irrigation system between each row of strawberries. The drip irrigation system provides the water & in most cases the liquid fertilizer for the plants throughout the season. The plants are spaced anywhere from 12 to 18" apart & 12" between rows.

Another slide showed the state of Florida and the production area in western Hillsborough and adjoining counties, an area of about 6000 acres devoted to strawberries. They can be grown throughout the state but this is the most concentrated area and the area where the main shipping industry is. There are many small farms scattered throughout the state but these are mostly U-pick operations.

The strawberry industry in Hillsborough County has been worth about \$150 million a year for the last few years. It's really a high value crop for such a small acreage. Most of the fruit is shipped to the northeast & midwest & some even makes its way up into eastern Canada. Because this is a fresh market shipping industry it's necessary to develop varieties that have good skin toughness and able to survive the long trip on refrigerated trucks.

Craig showed us a machine that is called a super bedder. It's pulled by a tractor and actually forms the raised beds. It also carries a roll of black plastic which it places as it forms the beds. The raised beds are used because they give better drainage. The black plastic keeps the fruit cleaner & helps in controlling weeds. The super bedder also has an attachment that punches the holes in the plastic for setting the strawberry plants.

We also saw slides of a nursery in New York state taken early in the season when the mother plants are beginning to produce daughter plants. They are basically grown on a flat field without any plastic mulch. Through the summer the daughter plants will root down and produce plants that can be harvested in the fall and shipped

to Florida for the Florida growers. We could see what it would look like late in the season before the plants are dug. The entire field was just a carpet of strawberry plants. We also saw one of the dug plants so we could see what they look like when they are planted in Florida. In some strawberry producing areas, all the leaves are removed before they are planted, but in Florida when we allow the leaves to remain, we get the plants off to a quicker start. The growers can get earlier flowering & fruiting, and early fruit production is very important for this industry to get the highest profit for their crop.

After the plants are set through the holes in the black plastic, the grower has to run his overhead irrigation for about 7 hours a day for anywhere from 7 to 10 days in order to get the plants established. The strawberries are put in in late October while it's still very hot frequently & if they're not kept irrigated, they will wilt & lay down on the hot plastic which will actually cook the leaves. The same overhead irrigation system is also used during the winter for freeze protection. The plants themselves are relatively cold hardy but the flowers and fruit are cold sensitive and sustain damage below 28-29°. Strawberry fruit & flowers can also be protected by row covers and this is a policy frequently practiced in north Florida, which will usually protect the fruit down to the mid 20's.

The most serious disease of strawberries in this area is called gray mold. It is also found in ever strawberry growing region in the world. Growers typically spray a fungicide on their plants once a week as a preventative to try to control this disease. In warm humid weather we can also suffer from a disease called anthracnose fruit rot. Some growers call it black spot. It produces a sunken lesion on the fruit & can be devastating if we have a warm wet spring.

Craig indicated that back in 1992 they released a strawberry variety they called "Sweet Charlie", which is actually resistant to anthracnose fruit rot. It also produces high early season yields,

which is the main reason the growers are growing it. Florida growers get good prices for their fruit thru the end of February, but as the California fruit becomes more available, prices will drop significantly in March & April.

Another disease of strawberries that occurs occasionally is crown rot. The plants become infected with it in the nursery & look perfectly fine when they're sent into the fields, but at some point during the growing season the plants just collapse. The plants propagated in northern USA and Canada are much less susceptible to this disease than plants propagated in Florida. Another variety was released in 1996 called Rosa Linda, which has quite good resistance to crown rot & reasonable resistance to anthracnose fruit rot, but it never became very popular because the fruit were no better than Sweet Charlie and were frequently smaller, especially late in the season. In the past year they have introduced 2 new varieties, once called "Early Bright". It produces small compact plants & large fruit with good flavor. The other variety released last

year is called "Strawberry Festival" in honor of the strawberry festival in Plant City. It has very attractive fruit throughout the season, firm, deep red, and should be a very good shipping berry. Unfortunately, it is susceptible to anthracnose fruit rot & crown rot.

Craig showed us another disease called green petal. It appears to be a problem that affects plants that come out of Canada, particularly in the Nova Scotia area. This disease is transmitted by leaf hoppers. It has some virus like symptoms but is actually more like a bacteria.

One of the few insect pests is the two spotted spider mite which can really be a problem, especially in warm dry years. And of course we're always subject to bird damage, especially by robins when they come through here. At times they can be pretty devastating.

The Research Center website is strawberry.ifas.ufl.edu
There is a lot of good information on the website concerning strawberries.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Jimmy Lee

To quote my predecessor, "The time has come for a changing of the guard again"; I want to thank the board of directors for having confidence in me. I am honored that they have elected me to be your President. I will strive to do the best that I can for the club.

Trying to fill the shoes of predecessors like *Charles Novak* and *Bob Heath* will be difficult to do, as these former presidents have many years of experience compared to a novice like *myself*. I will need the support of all the members to be successful; I want them to continue their involvement in the club and to carry on their good deeds of bringing plants and goodies for the Plant and Tasting tables.

I am also the "Programs Chairman", so I am open to any suggestions concerning speakers or activities that may interest you.

Remember, folks! This is your club; I will work along with you to make it better! So please get involved!

Just a reminder that the next meeting is April 8; instead of having our regular speaker, we will be having a "hands on" grafting workshop; this will be a good time to bring in your avocado seedlings and scions. The weekend after that will be our "Annual Spring Tree Sale" at USF. I look forward to seeing a strong turnout of club members to assist in making this event a successful one.

Let us look forward to a year of "*Good Relationships and Success*" for all of us.

MARCH PLANT RAFFLE

PLANT	DONOR	WINNER
Surinam Cherry	Heath	Mann
Rangoon Creeper	"	?
Aloe	"	Liliane Smoleny
Pineapple (Abaka)	"	Jim Burch
Banana (Apple)	"	Kent Helmick
Nopales Cactus	"	Buster
Eugenia Confusa	"	Rich Parker
Rose Apple	"	Jim Davis
Beauty Berry	"	Sal Russo
Chaya	"	?
Roselle	Sal Russo	Rose Tevewzi
"	"	Al
Fennel	"	Verna Dickey
Fennel	"	?
Key Apple	"	Tess Anthony
Surinam Cherry	"	Jim Davis
Basil	"	Susan Reed
Rose Banana	Rich Parker	Maryse Lamour
Rose Banana	Diane Jensen	Dan Griffin
Key Lime-2	Janet Conard	Tess Anthony
Mulberry	Al Roberts	Marv Hymes
Orchid Tree	Branesky	Betty ?
Louisiana Iris	Mann	Beth Reddicliff
Pomegranate	?	Keith Dwyer
Avocado - cold hardy	Novak	?
Surinam Cherry	"	?
Loquat from Israel	"	?
Bag of Lee Tangerines	"	Kent Helmick
Avocado-2	Lee	S. Reed
Indian Bean-4	"	?
Arrowhead	"	Beth Reddicliffe
Butterfly Plant	"	Thom Scott
Banana-2	Susan McAveety	A. Branesky
Mushroom Culture	Zmoda	John Kolb

Tasting Table: March 2001

Rose Terenzi: Bruschetta with Eggplant Salsa	Al Roberts: Cookies
Janet Conard: Chocolate Friendship Cake	Lillian Smolelmy: Cookies
Mann: Orange Oatmeal cookies	Thom Scott: Cucumber Salad
Beth Reddicliffe: Fresh Strawberries & Grapes	Nancy McCormack: Candy
Maryse Lamour: Grapefruit Prune Marmalade	
Branesky Family: Pork, Potato, Carrot, Pepper Dish, Jackfruit, Coconut	
Lee: Strawberry Bread with Strawberry Jelly, Sweet Potato Cake, Pummelo, Fresh Strawberries	
Novak: Strawberry Ambrosia Cupcakes, Lemon Pound Cake, Fresh Blood Oranges & Lee Tangerine, Punch	

THANKS for the delicious donations to the Tasting Table. Please remember to list your name and item(s) donated on the sheet provided and to get your free Plant Exchange ticket.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

Mar-Apr 2001

by PAUL ZMODA

Imagine a sweet kumquat - but 2" in diameter. A citrus fruit that is entirely edible. That's the sunquat. The sunquat was featured in the California Rare Fruit Growers Fruit Gardener magazine, December 1993 issue.

Discovered in 1959 by John R Brown, MD, William Chapman and Louis Walden in a Friendswood, TX citrus orchard, the sunquat was concluded to be a natural hybrid of a tangerine and a kumquat. This would make it a "mandaquat". It became "sunquat" later, perhaps to sound more user-friendly or because of its sunny, yellow peel.

Despite being known for so many years, the sunquat is only lately becoming more dispersed and enjoyed. I obtained one small sunquat tree in a trade over 4 years ago. Seedlings fruit true-to-type and this past fall we got about 2 dozen fruit. They are just as promised. If you like Meiwa kumquats, you should enjoy its much larger cousin.

With the blessings of the Dept. of Agriculture, I hope to have sunquat trees available by our fall plant sale.

I planted some seeds of the Puerto Rican mango known there as "Mangotina". These were the tiniest mangoes I have ever seen. These polyembryonic seeds should produce trees true-to-type.

New plantings: Blood orange, olive, squash, Chinese radishes, pole & lima beans, tomatoes, eggplant & peppers.

The following were elected to the Board of Directors at the March meeting:

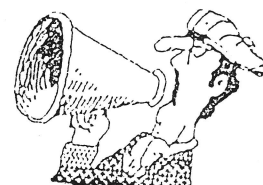
Bob Heath	Sally Lee	Charles Novak
Jim Lee	Jerry Amyot	Linda Novak
Sal Russo	Susan McAveety	Paul Branesky
Marilyn Weekley	Verna Dickey	Thom Scott
Jon Kolb	Tim Stout	Judy Cimafranco
Al Jean	Janet Conard	Beth Reddicliffe
Pat Jean		

Board Officers: President: Jim Lee
 Vice Presidents: Bob Heath, Charles Novak, Jerry Amyot
 Secretary: Linda Novak
 Treasurer: Susan McAveety

Committees: Newsletter: Bob Heath, Theresa Heath, Jim Lee, Sally Lee, Charles Novak
 Linda Novak
 Membership: Charles Novak
 Program: Jim Lee
 Seeds: Charles Novak
 Research: Bob Heath
 Librarian: Sal Russo
 Plant Raffle: Sally Lee

Members Corner

WANTED: 4 x 4 x 12 citri pots. Paul Zmoda 677-5985 or 932-2469.



New Members: March 2001

Jim & Beverly Burch	Tampa
Charlie & Kathy Crowley	Sarasota
Marvin Dawkins	Lutz
Jim Hartnett	Tampa
Gail Joseph	Tampa
Elaine Lanton	St Petersburg
Carol Morrow	Tampa
Tyson Richmond & Margaret Little	Tampa
Barrie & Chuck Slonim	Tampa
Robin Strudwick	Lutz
Andrea Topolcic	Tampa
Vance Carr	Miami
Roxanne Perez	Lithia
Yolanda Worthy	Lithia
Bruce & JoAnne Boyle	Clearwater
Donald Kraus & Julie Barrios	St Petersburg

Bus Trip to ECHO: Jim Lee and Paul Branesky are making arrangements for a club tour of the plantings (which include tropical fruit trees) at ECHO (Educational Concerns for Hunger Organization) in Ft. Myers. ECHO helps the hungry in their food-growing efforts and there are people all over the world who benefit from ECHO's services. The trip is scheduled for June 9. There will be a sign-up sheet available at the April meeting for those who would like to sign up to ride on the bus. The cost is \$10 per club member and the club will pay the balance for the bus rental.

Neophyte Errors #3

by SHERMAN DORN

Your upwardly-failing rare fruit friend here, with his conviction that it's time for us gardening failures to have some space in the newsletter! This month is about tie-MING, that instinct among neophyte Florida gardeners to do things at exactly the wrong moment in the year.

I will spare y'all the details of our beefsteak tomato plants set out in June, the various seedlings set out under an oak in March (we did that 2 years running before we realized that oaks here drop leaves and then pollen in March), or the beautiful lavender plant we got at a USF plant sale in June. I'm still not sure why we've never had more than 2 or 3 female squash flowers in 3 years at our house (my wife & daughter are feminists), though Sydney Park Brown thinks I've been planting too early or too late.

No, after all those failures and the ones listed in prior newsletters, I have some successes to report. First - and this is quite important - I REFUSED to buy plants during the spring drought. I gave in after the rains started, but my spouse forgave me. We water everything either by hand or by soaker hose and so have to be very conscious about what is dependent on watering.

Second, I figured out the fruit we want to have in our yard by (1) space and sun available and (2) the season of the fruit. I borrowed Lewis Maxwell's Florida Fruit and wrote down the fruit I'd like and then mapped out the fruit seasons (approximate but relevant). We've slowly been buying from the list and should, within a few years, have some home-grown fruit nearly year-round. That is, I will if I can keep the darned things alive. Anyone know which is the business end of this weeder I have?

***** MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL DUES (\$18) *****

PLEASE check your mailing label. If there is a RED mark on it, your membership expired March 31. Please pay at the next meeting or mail your check to the following address as soon as possible (check payable to RFCI):

RFCI
Charles Novak
2812 N. Wilder Road
Plant City, FL 33565-2669

Please renew your membership and come learn, enjoy, and share the world of rare fruit. Some of the extra benefits of your club include: Guest speakers, a fabulous tasting table, plant exchange, newsletter, club library, field trips, plant sales, free seed selection, and information exchange.

New membership directories will be printed in the near future. Notify Charles Novak (813-754-1399) of any name, address, phone and e-mail changes.

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