



# NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2002

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

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

NEXT MEETING: FEBRUARY 10

PROGRAM: OUR PROGRAM FOR SUNDAY, FEB. 10, WILL BE OUR PARTICIPATION IN THE FLORIDA STATE FAIR where we will be conducting a CITRUS CELEBRATION & FRUIT TASTING. This is an urgent, important, critical affair for the Club where our expertise will be exposed to the scrutiny of many thousands of people. If we do a good job, we will show them what a great organization the Rare Fruit Council of Tampa Bay really is and develop in people the importance of growing the unusual fruit that we consider so interesting. For more information, see comments from our president Jimmy Lee on page 02-13.

## WHAT'S HAPPENING

Jan-Feb 2002

by PAUL ZMODA

Well, we made it through the coldest spell of the season so far with minimal damage. We endured 33°F on one morning with heavy frost: not really bad, as we've seen much colder temperatures before. Tomatoes, peppers and beans are history. Onions, broccoli, cabbage, mustards, peas, lettuce and herbs just laughed it off. The bananas don't look so good, but are alive and already showing new, green shoots.

Our "Julie" mango began blooming before the cold and I had decided to allow the flowers to develop this year unhindered. I had built a wooden frame over the tree and pinned it to the ground. When the freeze threatened, I threw many layers of blankets, sheets and plastic over the frame and went as far as placing a 100 watt light bulb underneath. We lost no mango flowers to the cold.

Mango flowers must have ventilation so you should uncover as soon as possible after freezes. It is also highly recommended to spray them weekly with copper fungicide to ward off anthracnose fungus which turns them black and non-viable. The mango flower pollinators observed were mainly several species of flies which worked the flowers during the day.

Tea seedlings have been given individual pots in which to grow. Japanese persimmon "Honan Red" was chip-grafted on native persimmon seedling rootstocks.

The pruning classes on Jan. 20 went very well. There were 2 small groups learning how to treat deciduous fruit trees at our Flatwoods Fruit Farm. I demonstrated the proper methods of pruning muscadine and bunch grapes, how to open up peach and plum trees into the popular vase shape, and general pruning techniques for mulberries and pecans. Monica Brandeis took photos for an upcoming story and I answered many questions.

New planting: "Misty" blueberry.

## Jim Mercer on Persimmons

Jim Mercer was a charter member of the Tampa Bay Rare Fruit Council, one of the 12 or so who began our club. Jim said he was honored to be with us, though he felt that speaking to a group of experts was a real problem but, hopefully, he could tell us a couple of things that would be of some help. Jim had a nursery in Clearwater for 31 years but retired about 23 years ago, selling the nursery and moving to Chiefland. He was getting tired of the nursery business and was ready to sell his nursery business and do something else; but selling a nursery is really not easy. However, one day a lady who had worked for him for many years in the past came in and asked, "Is your nursery for sale by any chance"? Jim pondered that for about 3 seconds before he said, "I don't know why not," so in 30 days he was moving to north Florida, Yankee country. There's a lot of Yankees moving there now, that area of Florida is the new frontier, beautiful area with beautiful climate. Of course for the last 3 years we've been in a drought. Plants adapt to changing conditions and this past season Jim says they had the best persimmon crop they've ever had. Apparently his persimmon trees have adjusted somewhat to the drought, with beautiful persimmons and what he described as almost perfect fruit.

The persimmon is like an apple - it has a depression around the stem that can collect water where bacteria can breed and sometimes go into the fruit and cause calyx separation or blackening around the stem. He was spared this problem because of lack of rain. They start picking and packing about the first of September; they polish their fruit before they pack it, which makes it very pretty.

When their grove was about 4 years old and was beginning to fruit, one day a man from Miami happened by. He said he knew an Oriental man, a doctor, who would like to buy some fruit, so he ordered 10 half-bushel boxes of fruit. The doctor distributed it all over Florida to friends in Miami & Orlando, Jacksonville and Tallahassee. This is what started their business. They never had to advertise and they always sold all

the fruit they could pick and pack.

There has been a lot of research going on on root stock for persimmons in California for quite a while, but we seem to be kind of backward here, thinking we have to grow all persimmons on Virginiana root stock in Florida. Persimmons grow wild in the woods. They grow into big trees with lots of fruit. But something strange happens when it is used for root stock for Kaki persimmon. It is reported to shorten the life of the persimmons anywhere from 3 to 20 years. Jim indicated that supposedly there is a fungus that the Virginiana root stock picks up and carries up into the Kaki persimmon and causes dieback or wilt. It is said to shorten the life of the persimmon considerably, but Jim indicated that most of his trees have lasted as much as 22 years and are still going. For our own use, Jim suggests that we only plant 2 or 3 trees because when they get old enough to bear they can put on a lot of fruit.

He said persimmons will not compete with other trees and with other persimmon trees, so they need to be planted far enough apart that they do not interfere with other trees. He recommends that trees in a grove should be planted 20 feet apart each way because persimmons are low and spreading and at 20 feet apart, they will allow some room between them at maturity but just enough to walk through. Trees in a row can actually touch their branches but trees between the rows are going to have to be pruned down through the years to keep the orchard open between the rows. Persimmons will grow well in rocky soil, soil with a lot of clay or Florida sand. The trees definitely like a pH of 6 to 7, preferably about 6.5. Most soils would be fine but it would pay to check the pH and adjust as necessary. The soil in the immediate area where you intend to plant should also be cultivated, prepared with humus and should have the pH corrected if necessary.

Jim prefers 3 major persimmons for growing and that he recommends to all of us for certain good qualities. Hachiya is an astringent variety, it's large and

has excellent flavor. It's a poor bearer and drops a lot of fruit, but the quality of the fruit makes up for this disadvantage. Saijo is claimed to be the best persimmon in the world in flavor, texture and production on the tree. The individual fruit are not so big but the total production is great. The Saijo is astringent so it must be eaten dead ripe and soft, which some people object to, especially when they try to eat it before it is soft enough. It is also one of the earliest, coming mature in early August all the way up to the first of December.

The Fuyu is the third persimmon that Jim recommends. It is an excellent persimmon, non-astringent and starts ripening about early October and is gone late in December. The Fuyu is one of the sweetest and they get sweeter as the weeks go by so the ones toward the end of December are actually the best.

Most advice on raising persimmons indicates that a pollinator is needed. It is recommended to have one male pollinator for every 7 female plants and Jim indicates that if there is a pollinator available and close by, every flower on the persimmon trees will produce a fruit with up to 7 seeds in each one. Then there will be so many fruit on the tree that they won't grow very large. Also, Jim says, it is a waste to have a pollinator because persimmons will fruit without pollen. They do not need to be pollinated. However, it takes about 5 years for a tree to start holding its fruit. Before that most of the fruit will drop. After 8 or 10 years a tree will produce twice to 3 times as many fruit as it should and can adequately support. After 5 years or so Jim recommends thinning the fruit very early. So forget about the pollinators; they are male trees. If you plant seeds from persimmons, you can expect to get about 50% male trees which, Jim says, is not wise. Oriental persimmons should be grafted on Virginiana root stock because the Oriental persimmon is very subject to root nematodes.

Jim said if you've seen native persimmons growing wild, you will note that some of them are growing in

highland sand while others may be growing in swampy areas. Our native persimmon is not too particular. Those growing in deep sandy soil will have deep roots going way down into the ground; those in swampy areas will have surface roots.

Jim sells grafted persimmon trees and recommends grafting the tree after 1 year and selling the tree after the second year. He says it's amazing sometimes how fast they'll grow; he's had a tree grow up to 11 feet in 1 year. When you decide to plant persimmons trees, you should find a good reliable source, someone who stands behind their trees and has trees from good stock. Buy trees from someone who'll trim them back for you, cut the top out and trim the roots. Most commercial nurseries will just dig them out of the ground and sell them like that and you're supposed to know what to do with them. The trees should be cut off at about 3 feet and the roots should be pruned to 8 inch roots for bare root trees and what is vitally important when the tree comes out of the ground, it needs to go immediately into water. On the 2 year trees, Jim says 8" of root in any direction from the trunk at the ground is all the tree needs. When you prune the roots, each root end produces several new roots so the pruned roots form a network of new roots and the better the tree will grow. Bare root persimmon trees should be planted in the dead of winter, late December, January, early February. He says to plant the persimmon tree, dig a hole big enough for all the roots, fill it with water, put in the persimmon tree, add the soil and water it down so it will compact around the roots without actually compacting the soil with your foot. A handful of clay phosphate or rock phosphate should be mixed with the soil as it is added. Phosphate, of course, is beneficial to root growth. A persimmon that's grown in a pot and is root bound needs special treatment when planting, Jim says. The tree needs to be removed from the pot in the dead of winter, bare rooted and root pruned in a tub of water to keep it wet. He stressed the fact again that the roots must be kept wet at all times. If they dry out, they're dead. However, Jim said if the trees are planted properly, after they have started growing, you probably don't need to water them unless the soil gets exceedingly

dry. He said he has never watered his trees; there is enough rainfall to take care of them once they get established, but he warns us if we see the leaves tending to wilt, especially in this drought we're in, he would recommend using a little water.

Fertilizer. Jim asked if any of us were using 4-6-8 fertilizer. It's hard to get anymore. It was a popular fertilizer back in the 20's but very few nurseries carry it today. This used to be the regular citrus fertilizer and Jim calls it the best you can use. The low nitrate and high potassium is

excellent for citrus trees and persimmons. He indicates that we should add a little magnesium, epsom salts. With 40 lbs. of fertilizer, 1 lb. of epsom salts is sufficient. In addition, the fertilizer should have all of the trace minerals that are used by plants in very small quantities, but are very critical. Jim suggests keeping the area around trees clear of grass and weeds and do not mulch. Weeds and grass growing under the tree will just use up the nutrients the tree needs. Mulch tends to cause the tree to create shallow roots.

### **Fruit Tasting Event at the Florida State Fair Sunday, February 10, 8:30AM-4P.M.**

We are busily making preparations for this event. Arrangements are being made to have available as many varieties of citrus and tropical fruits as we can obtain. We will need members to help pick citrus, cut up fruit into sample size pieces on Sunday, give out juice samples, answer questions from the public, and help wherever needed. A big 'Thank You' to everyone who signed up to help with this event.

**Saturday – February 9, 9 AM , Pick fruit at George Riegler's:** Members who have signed up to help pick fruit at George Riegler's should meet at George's place at 9 A.M. Bring your clippers and your appetite. Hamburgers, hotdogs, chips and drinks will be provided. For questions, directions or more information call Jim & Sally Lee (813) 982-9359 or Charles Novak (813) 754-1399 or Bob Heath (813) 289-1068.

**Sunday – February 10, 8:30 A.M. – 4 P.M. Fruit Tasting at the Florida State Fair:** Members who are helping with the Fruit tasting should plan to be at the Family Living Center Building at 8:30 A.M. We will be very busy as we start offering samples to the public at 10AM. We will contact members who have signed up to help with this event by phone, e-mail, etc., to arrange delivery of fair tickets and to advise you of any new information concerning this event. Please call one of the phone numbers in the above paragraph if you have questions.

**Tampa Bay RFCI T-shirts:** A free club t-shirt to members who help at the State Fair Fruit tasting event – and have not already received a club t-shirt.

**Florida State Fair Exhibit:** Again this year, the Tampa Bay RFCI will be setting up an exhibit at the Florida State Fair (Feb. 7-18). The requirements are: the exhibit should be artistically designed to display the species in which the society specializes and should be maintained at a high standard of quality for the duration of the fair. Free tickets will be mailed out to members who signed up to man the exhibit during the fair. Spend a few hours at the exhibit talking to the public about tropical fruit and then enjoy the rest of the fair.



## From the President Jimmy Lee

We had a very good turnout at the January meeting. Jim Mercer's presentation on Persimmons was very interesting and informative. The new meeting place (Westside Conference Center on USF) is large and meets our needs. We had many favorable comments about the room.

We had many delicious items to sample on the Tasting Table. Thanks to all the members who brought food and plants for the plant exchange.

Our Citrus Celebration/Fruit Tasting Event at the Florida State Fair will be on Sunday, February 10. Thanks to everyone who signed up to help at this event. We are counting on your help to make this event a success. For those members who plan to help at this event, please be at the Florida Living Center at 8:30 A.M. We start serving fruit at 10 A.M. so we have only an hour and a half to cut up the fruit for sampling as well as making other necessary preparations. If you have questions please contact me at (813) 982-9359 or Charles Novak at (813) 754-1399. **\*\*\*Also, please read this newsletter carefully as there is more on this event.**

### Scheduled Programs:

- February 10: Citrus Celebration/Fruit tasting at the State Fair
- March 10: Winemaking by Walter Yoblonski (club member and a former Winery owner) at USF Botanical Garden
- April 13-14: Spring Plant Festival at USF Botanical Garden

### Tasting Table: January 2002

Paul Branesky: Tofu Fried Rice	Mann: Steamed carambola & fruit plate
Angel Branesky: Cherries	Karin Yoblonski: Orange Bread, orange marmalade
Steven Branesky: Plum tomatoes	Jan Conard: Choc. Covered Ritz crackers & peanut butter
Myren Branesky: Pink Pummelo	Rose Terenzi: Chocolate cake, Pumpkin cake
Musgraves: Donut holes	Iris Stout: Kumquat pie, tropical chicken salad
Lanny Brooks: Banana pudding	Paul Zmoda: Candied papaya
Harris: Orange slices	Cora Coronel: Sweet Rice Bibblingka
Beverly Burch: Chips & salsa	Thom Scott: Orange coleslaw & Jicama
Nancy McCormack: Muffins	Sonia Saceda Bigelow: Calamondin pie
Verna Dickey: Cookies	Marie Palis: Cranberry muffins
Lee: Pork stir-fried vegetables, cherry pie, persimmon jam & crackers, Persimmon brownies	
Apple juice, fruit punch	
Novak: Lime cookies, Orange-choc. chip cookies, banana-orange nut bread, Lemon squares,	
Juices: Guanabana, passion fruit & guava	

**THANKS** for the delicious contributions to the Tasting Table. It was ***Fabulous***, as always. Each person or family who brings a dish for the tasting table may receive one free ticket for the plant exchange.

**Board of Directors Election in March:** Any member who is interested in being on the Board of Directors should contact a member of the Nominating Committee. The Nominating Committee consists of Sally Lee (813) 982-9359 and Al & Pat Jean (813) 973-3619. The list of candidates will be published in the March newsletter and will be presented at the March meeting. Additional nominations may also be presented from the floor. The Board of Directors will be elected at the March meeting by a majority vote of the general membership present and voting. Directors serve a one (1) year term and will assume their respective offices immediately after the March meeting. The Board meets monthly or at such times deemed necessary. The Board of Directors is responsible for the policies, finances and direction of the Chapter.

## The Market Stand: CITRUS, Part II

Family: Rutaceae    Genus: Citrus    Species: Various

Since its introduction to St Augustine, FL in 1565, the state has become the foremost producer of citrus in the U.S., 70% of the total, leading the nation in the production of tangelos, temples, grapefruit, limes, oranges and tangerines. Florida is the largest grower of grapefruit in the world and second largest for oranges. There are over 100 million citrus trees in the orchards and yards of the state.

Called the Sunshine State, Florida could as easily be termed the Citrus State, for no other state or nation is more closely identified with a particular fruit. The orange blossom is the state flower, the tree is featured on the state seal and the fruit on the license plate. We have Orange County, Citrus County, Orange Bowls and citrus queens...

I was born and raised in Florida. As a consequence, I feel that citrus is ingrained in my very fiber. To me, it is more American than apple pie. It was always in the refrigerator, in our neighborhoods and in the public schools - my daily bread. No yard with citrus was safe from us. We foraged like mice in a field of grain, a world of super-abundance. I would often return home for the night, my lips burning from citrus peel-induced dermatitis. Try as we might, we could not consume them all, much of it went to waste. The rotted fruit became the toys of our wars, hurling them at one another. So having grown up of citrus, it is natural that they now grow up with me in my yard.

Five years ago, I planted a Sunburst tangerine from a 5 gal. pot. It has grown so fast, large and heavy with fruit, that this past summer the tree split in half during the passing of a tropical storm. It was holding about 400 tangerines at the time. I immediately stripped off 300 of those fruit so that I could approximate and secure the wound. Thus far it appears to be healing without any sign of distress. In retrospect, I probably could have avoided that problem had I either thinned the fruit or braced its branches.

In all, I have 9 citrus trees: Duncan grapefruit; Sunburst tangerine; Hamlin orange; 2 Valencia oranges; Cara Cara red navel orange; variegated orangequat; variegated pink lemon; and a seedling orange. Some are young trees and some old. The young trees I routinely feed and irrigate to keep them growing strong - a recommended practice for fast healthy growth and improved fruit quality and quantity. The older trees are less well attended to, yet they grow and yield abundant, flavorful fruit. In my life, I have known many established citrus trees that thrived for years without any maintenance. Citrus culture is much less demanding than most other fruit trees, requiring little or no pruning and infrequent pest control. Site selection is important. Avoid areas of poor drainage or standing water. Some shade is tolerable but full sun allows for more growth and fruit.

The former owner of my property told me that she had planted the seedling orange some 40 years ago from a navel seed. It produces very sweet, pale colored, moderately seedy fruit and a rare fruit will exhibit naveling. Obviously this tree did not grow true to type but many citrus will. This is possible through a process known as nucellar embryony whereby the seeds contain more than one embryo. One embryo may be the product of pollination and the others are derived from the parent plant. In some cases no pollination will have occurred. The pollinated seedling will of course, have the characteristics of both parents whereas the nucellar seedlings will be identical to the parent plant.

However, the preferred method of citrus propagation is by budding/grafting. This reliably ensures true to type lineage and brings the plants into production sooner. Also, budding to a desired root stock can confer many additional benefits such as disease resistance, improved fruit quality, increased cold tolerance, early maturity, dwarfing and accommodation to adverse soil conditions. With so many

possible combinations of citrus trees and root stocks a little research is advised, consult your local Extension Service for what's best for your area. Whether you live in the panhandle of Florida or the Keys, there are citrus trees that can enhance your landscape and your life.

Thom Scott

**Welcome to our New Members:** John & Niki Hill      Valrico, FL  
Nancy Gasperment      Brandon, FL

## JANUARY PLANT EXCHANGE

Papaya	Heath	Betty Bruder
Rose Apple	"	J. Cimafranca
Passion Fruit - 2	"	?
Moranga	"	Michael Gertinisan
Cactus	"	Buster Keaton
Genip	"	Y. Divan
Papaya	Lee	Betty Bruder
"	"	Hunt
Sugar Cane - 2	"	?
Egg Plant 6 pkgs	"	Janet C., Walter Y.
Cukes 3 pkgs	"	Walt Yoblonski
Tomatoes 4 pkgs	"	Nancy McCormack
Green Tomato	"	?
Citrus Seedling	"	?
Red Pineapple	"	?
Aloe	Heath	?
Honey	John Stonehouse	?
Cuban Oregano	Walter Yoblonski	Shane Smith
Moranga - 2	Paul Braneski	?
Seminole Pumpkin - 3	T. Scott	?
Jicama	"	?
Guava	John Staries	?
Honeybell Oranges - 3	Sharon Pilot	?
Meyer Lemons	?	Hunt
" "	?	Shane Smith

## SAVE THE BIRDS

Recently we received the following letter. Anyone who can help, please do so.

I work at the Lowry Park Zoo in Tampa ([www.lowryparkzoo.com](http://www.lowryparkzoo.com)), and am hoping you can put me in touch with persimmon growers. Persimmons make up 80% of the endangered Great Indian Hornbill's diet in the wild, and now that their breeding season has arrived, we want to do everything possible to help them out. Other fruits that are important during their breeding season are papayas, sassafras, nutmeg and cinnamon. We are a non-profit organization and finding extra money to spend on fruit for the animals can be difficult. Any help would be greatly appreciated. Ann Federovich LPZ0040@aol.com 813-935-8552 ext 229

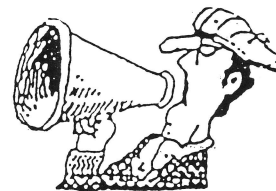
## Condolences...

Sadly, we report the passing of one of our active members, Don Long, and offer condolences to his loving wife, Linda, children and grandchildren. He will be sorely missed by those who knew him. Contributions may be made to Moffitt Cancer Center, Lifepath Hospice Care or the Apostles Lutheran Church in Brandon.

## MEMBERS' CORNER

Several months ago when I offered a book on Fruit Breeding, several people prepaid the \$5 preceding my bringing in the books from my truck. I believe one lady did not pick up her book. If you remember this, please contact me or leave a message with Charles/Linda/Bob/Jimmy.

Art Hedstrand

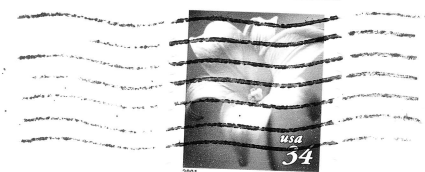


This is your newsletter. Is it as valuable as you would like it to be? Is my column on yard visits useful to you? How could it be improved? Are there other types of articles you would like to see? Contact me and the Editors.

Art Hedstrand  
33456 Cortez Blvd  
Ridge Manor FL 33523

We still have lots of free clay pots in a range of sizes. We also have mycorrhizae in quart jars - \$5.00 each - call Bob Heath at 813-289-1068 evenings.

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