RFCI NEWSLETTER MARCH 2003

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

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

PRESIDENT: JIM LEE WEBSITE: www.rarefruit.org (CHARLES NOVAK)

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

NEXT MEETING: MARCH 9

PROGRAM: OUR SPEAKER THIS MONTH IS JIM ALDERMAN JR WITH THE DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE. He will be discussing the honeybee and other kinds of bees and how important they are in pollination of food crops. This is an interesting subject and one intimately associated with our efforts to grow fruiting trees. We will meet at 2:00 pm in our regular meeting place at USF in the WCC Building, Westside Conference Center. See map page 03-17. Come to enjoy our fabulous tasting table and exciting raffle. Bring something to the meeting and enjoy. The March meeting is our election time for the Board of Directors. We will hold our election as the first order of business and we may all meet our Board members. There will be a Board meeting after the regular meeting to elect officers and all members are invited to attend. See page 03-16 for list of candidates.

FROM THE PRESIDENT
Jimmy Lee

A big THANK YOU to Thom Scott for designing the Club's exhibit at the Florida State Fair Horticulture Society competition. The exhibit was awarded Firth place. The award included the large yellow rosette and $75. Societies also receive a $200 set-up premium. Thanks to the many members who spent time manning the exhibit and talking with the public. The public is always very interested in the display of unusual fruit and fruiting trees and they ask many questions.

On Feb. 9 we held our Citrus Celebration at the Florida State Fair. Unfortunately the weather was rainy and cold which kept many fairgoers away. Even so, we had over 400 people sample the extensive variety of citrus fruit. All the members who helped with this event are to be commended for their hard work and good cheer. Thanks to George and Elaine Riegler and the Applebys for their generous donation of citrus fruit for this event. I want to thank my crew of eight for picking fruit at Appleby's on Friday, Feb. 8; and especially Robert & Verna Dickey for delivering the fruit to the Fair on Sunday morning. A big 'Thank You' to members who picked and washed fruit at George's on Saturday. We enjoyed hamburgers, hotdogs, chips and drinks provided by the club and the Rieglers, and side dishes and desserts provided by members.

It is again time for the election of the Board of Directors and Officers. I hope everyone will attend the March meeting and participate in this important election. Anyone interested in being on the Board should contact Sally Lee (813-982-9359) or Walt Yoblonski (813-633-7754).

It has been my pleasure and honor to serve as the club's president this past year. I appreciate the fact that without our hard working members we couldn't have succeeded at any of our club events. Once again, I stress to you that this is your club; you are part of our successes and I hope you will continue to participate in all the events and workshops that are scheduled. I hope you will give your new president all the support that you have given me. Again, I appreciate having had the opportunity to serve as your president. If you are ever in need of my help please don't hesitate to call me at (813) 982-9359.

Scheduled Programs and Speakers:

March 9: Jim Alderman, Jr., Dept. of Agriculture, "How Bees Pollinate"
April 12-13: USF Botanical Garden Spring Plant Festival
May 11: Gene Joyner of Unbelievable Acres

New Members:

Margaret James-Driskell	Lakeland, FL	Joanne Kitchen	Tampa, FL
Jim Tipton	Fortuna, CA	Joe Sasser	Panama City, FL
Lois Duffey & Walter Stahl	Clearwater, FL		

A warm welcome to our new members and we hope to see you at the March meeting.

Board of Directors Election: The list of candidates for the club's Board of Directors will be presented at the March 9 meeting. Additional nominations may be presented from the floor. Directors must be willing and able to make a significant commitment of time and energy to the club-and attend a majority of the board meetings. Directors will be elected at the March meeting by a majority vote of the general membership present and voting, for a one year term. Directors will assume their respective offices immediately after the March meeting. The Board meets monthly or at such times deemed necessary. The Board is responsible for the policies, finances and direction of the Chapter.

Candidates for the Board of Directors:

Bob Heath	Paul Branesky	Judy Cimafranco
Jimmy Lee	Sally Lee	Jim Stout
Charles Novak	Linda Novak	Jerry Amyot
Marilyn Weekley	Verna Dickey	Walt Yoblonski
Susan McAveety	Thom Scott	Jerry Springer
Pat McGauley		

Please plan to attend the March meeting and vote for your Board of Directors. All Board of Directors meetings are open to the entire membership and we encourage members to attend and participate in the discussion of issues.

***MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL DUES ($18) DUE MARCH 31

Please check your mailing label. If there is a RED mark on it, your membership expires March 31. Please pay your dues at the next meeting or mail your check to the following address by April 15, 2003. Make check payable to: **Tampa Bay RFCI**

Mail check to: RFCI
Charles Novak
2812 N. Wilder Rd.
Plant City, FL 33565-2669

WHAT'S HAPPENING
Feb-Mar 2003
by PAUL ZMODA

More and more of our club members have access to computers these days, so I thought I would mention their value pertaining to fruit growers. That the internet can open doors leading to so much useful information is very exciting. You may track down selles of rare fruit trees which you have longed to grow. Learn about the trees' origins, their care and nutritional values, etc., with a little time spent at a keyboard. Expert growers in far away lands will send you tips and knowledge which they may have gathered for many years of their lives. The internet is a valuable tool that can save you time in your quests for information and plant sources.

I make frequent visits to a website called GardenWeb.com. Here, in the "forums" arena, anyone can tap into numerous categories such as: Plant Propagation, Fruits and Orchards, Vegetable Gardening, Plant Exchanges, Florida Gardening, Bananas, Trees and on & on. It's fantastic. Site visitors can post questions that they wish to have answered & discussed by like-minded folks worldwide. You can absorb quite a lot of practical information through others' plant growing experiences.

Let's not forget our own Rare Fruit Council's website: WWW.rarefruit.org. Thanks to the hard work of club members such as Charles Novak, we can see what the entire world sees: information of our club's interests and progress as well as that of many interesting fruiting plants.

New plantings: Key lime, carrots, onions, lettuce, string beans, broccoli, water oak.

COLD HARDY AVOCADOS

by Dr. A.H. Krezdorn

The avocado is one of the native fruits of this hemisphere and has become one of the more important commercial fruits. There are three recognized races of avocado, West Indian (Persea americana, var. americana), Guatemalan (Persea americana, var. guatemalensis or P. nubigena, var. guatemalensis) and Mexican (Persea americana, var. drymifolia). The West Indian avocado is typically a pear shaped large fruit with thin skin and a large seed and is native to the hot, humid lowland tropics. The Guatemalan avocado is usually of a rounder shape, with a thick, woody, rough peel (up to $\frac{1}{4}$" thick) and has a smaller seed. It is native to the Central American highlands. Also native to the highlands is the Mexican race, a small, black, thin skinned fruit. The Mexican race has the greatest cold tolerance, followed by the Guatemalan, and then the West Indian with the least.

The Mexican avocado, having the highest oil content, tends to have the best flavor. Adapted to a cool dry climate, and to altitudes up to 10,000 feet, the Mexican race does have problems adjusting to Florida conditions. The hot humid lowland conditions tend to cause uneven ripening (one end ripening before the other), and cracking of the skin. Some crack only on the stem end, like the variety 'Gainesville', a particularly hardy avocado. 'Gainesville' has withstood temperatures down to 15 F. with no damage. When I moved to Gainesville in 1960, I found a very large old avocado tree growing on the campus. It is still there. I traced down the history in an old annual report. It was planted in 1922 by Dr. Newell on what used to be the horticultural farm and is now the center of the campus. This tree is probably the hardiest that we have found, the 1962 freeze killing it back to 1" to 2" wood due to 7 or 8 hours at 14 F. Wood from this tree was given to Lawrence Zill for propagation. He gave it the name 'Gainesville.'

'Mexicola' exhibits growth cracks at the end and may have anthracnose problems. It is another small hardy (15 to 20 degrees F. range) Mexican with black skin. A California commercial variety, 'Bacon', a Mexican-Guatemalan hybrid, although less hardy (25 F. range) produces a good fruit.

Cold hardiness needs understanding and definition. Any avocado tree, Mexican included, is quite tender when young. Until a tree has developed sufficient canopy, it is quite susceptible to freezes. In Florida, the typical radiation freeze occurs when the heat absorbed by the earth during the day from the direct sunlight is allowed to radiate back into space at night. A tree with adequate canopy will entrap the radiation from the soil beneath. Bare soil (weed and grass free) will absorb and release more heat. Likewise, a moist soil will hold more heat than a dry soil. So a large tree will be warmed by the soil and take longer to reach ambient air temperatures. Likewise, due to radiation, leaf and twig temperatures, when exposed to open sky, may be as much as 10 degrees F. colder than the air temperature. So, a small tree, especially under one year old, will be prone to freeze death under such conditions due to its lack of canopy.

Microclimate conditions may be very important in determining the survival of the tree. Proximity to a building or buildings may raise the ambient temperature 10 degrees F. or so. Elevation is very important as still, cold air drains down a slope. Thus a tree at the top of a slope may survive when one at the bottom is killed outright. To illustrate the use of microclimates, I have even grown a West Indian lime in Gainesville by espaliering it against a heated brick building.

Not conducting a sophisticated research program on cold hardy avocados, but as a hobby, I have investigated trees being grown in the colder locations of the state. A man named Young in Jacksonville, who used to be a pilot and a hide buyer in Mexico, brought back graftwood from a tree that was covered with snow at the time. The tree, named 'Young', bears fruit indistinguishable from 'Mexicola' (and like thousands of other black-fruited trees growing in Mexico). It is nearly as hardy as 'Gainesville', perhaps a degree or two less so.

Near Leesburg, a lady named Sims told me of a tree that had survived when all the citrus froze, standing on the property of a man named Heynes, the tree being so named. The fruit is typically Mexican, although green skinned, that is, thin skinned with a large loose seed inside which rattles. There are probably others scattered around Florida planted by individuals who have acquired seed from Mexico. In recent years I have not found any new ones.

'Mexicola' is a good fruit if handled properly. How you ripen avocados is very important. The avocado is a climacteric fruit, meaning that it will not ripen on the tree. The avocado will not get soft or become fully mature on the tree. Some varieties will store well on the tree, especially in California. The cool climate there permits 'Fuerte' to be picked from November through April. Here the small Mexican fruit may start ripening from one end or from both ends and stay green in the middle. The solution is to put them in a cool, air-conditioned room at about 75 F. and they will then ripen properly without cracking.

'Brogden', obviously a West Indian-Mexican hybrid, was discovered in Winter Haven by a lady named Crockett. The mature tree will take about 22 F. without damage. This is a good variety for Central Florida, provided it is not planted in a cold pocket. I personally think the 'Brogden' is a very good avocado, particularly if you can't get anything else. Even though it is a black skinned fruit, it does not crack.

At this point let us examine one characteristic of avocados. Even in Gainesville avocados begin to bloom in January and continue until April. Certain varieties, like 'Mexicola' and 'Brogden', will have their flowers frozen repeatedly but continue blooming. In effect, the freezes cause a thinning out of fruit, preventing a too heavy fruit set which tends to occur after mild winters.

The 'Brogden' has a yellow, buttery flesh, not too much fiber and good flavor. Although it has too large a seed, it is a good avocado for Central Florida.

The 'Heynes' is an attractive avocado, not of bad quality, and does not crack badly unless conditions are very wet when ripening. The varieties 'Gainesville', 'Mexicola' and 'Heynes' are summer maturing, from June, July onward, depending upon the date of the last freeze. 'Brogden' ripens in August and September.

'Yama' is from California and is about as cold hardy as 'Mexicola' and 'Gainesville', but does not fruit well here. Occasionally it will bear well, but I had a 25' tree in Gainesville and often got only 15 to 20 fruit, which was very discouraging.

'Topa Topa', also from California, and from the Topa Topa Ranch and Nursery, is often used for rootstock as it is a Mexican variety. 'Topa Topa' cracks badly and does not flower repeatedly so that freezes will greatly reduce the yield.

'Duke' (also Mexican) is more famous as a rootstock (in California) than as an eating variety, but is perhaps a degree or two less cold tolerant than 'Brogden'. I have seen 'Duke' freeze right alongside of a 'Brogden' that did not freeze. Not of particularly good eating quality, 'Duke' is a useful rootstock because of significant tolerance to Phytophthora cinnamomi.

'Winter Mexican' is a variety that was pushed heavily by the late Will Ward in Avon Park. It is likewise not quite as hardy as 'Brogden', but very close to it. It is a beautiful green fruit, does not crack, is of good eating quality and yields quite well. I have grown it in Gainesville with protection. 'Ettinger' (from Israel) is slightly less cold hardy than 'Winter Mexican', about 24 or 25 degrees F., but is a very good fruit, ripening around September or October. It is propagated by Lawrence Zill in Boynton Beach. 'Teague' (CRC 1411) has not proven to be as cold hardy in Florida as claimed in California. I have grown it in Gainesville and found the best you can expect is 25 or 26 degrees F. before it is damaged.

(To be continued.)

Spring USF Botanical Garden Plant Festival: Saturday and Sunday, April 12 &13. This event is an opportunity for Club members to sell their extra fruiting plants. For more information contact Bob Heath at (813) 289-1068 or Charles Novak at (813) 754-1399. Complete information concerning this Festival will be presented in the April Newsletter.

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