



RFCI

NEWSLETTER

TAMPA BAY CHAPTER of the

RARE FRUIT COUNCIL INTERNATIONAL INC

APR 2007

EDITORS: BOB HEATH, PAULA HARDWICK, CHARLES NOVAK, LINDA NOVAK, TERRY LEE

PRESIDENT: CHARLES NOVAK

WEBSITE: www.rarefruit.org (CHARLES NOVAK)

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

NEXT MEETING: APR 14 & 15 @ USF (SEE BELOW)

PROGRAM: THE USF SPRING PLANT FESTIVAL IS SCHEDULED FOR APRIL 14 & 15.

Consequently, we will forego our usual monthly meeting which would be on the 2nd Sunday, April 8th, to participate in the USF Plant Festival. All members are invited to participate and bring plants to donate or sell. Parking is free but admission is \$3.00, for which the Club will reimburse workers who participate in the Sale. This is an interesting affair and well worth the admission. Likewise, it is a social event as well as a money maker for the Club. We will have no tasting table or plant raffle. But we desperately need workers. Let's make this USF Sale our big one. Please join us!

USF SPRING PLANT FESTIVAL

The RFCI will participate in the USF Plant Festival on Apr. 14 & 15, 2007. 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 visit other groups. Our participation will begin around 3:00 Friday afternoon, Apr. 13, raising tents, setting up tables, arranging plants and posters, till about 6:00 p.m.

On Saturday, Apr. 14, the Gardens will be open from 7:00 to 9:00 a.m. for our final preparations.

The front gate will close at 8:30 a.m. on Saturday & Sunday, and participants will enter by the side south gate after the front gate closes, on foot, until 9:00. The public will be admitted at 10 a.m. on both days. Admission is \$3.00.

From 7:00 to 9:00 a.m. on Saturday & Sunday, traffic will be one way, in the front gate & out the side gate. The Festival will end at 4:00 p.m. on Saturday & 3:00 p.m. on Sunday. Only after 4:15 on Saturday & 3:40 on Sunday, will we be allowed to bring vehicles in to re-supply or remove plants.

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

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.

We have provided ID cards for RFCI workers. Only those with ID cards will be admitted before the Sale begins. If you are refused admittance, someone from our group will vouch for you to gain admittance. Wear your RFCI T-shirt.

DIRECTIONS TO USF PLANT FESTIVAL: Enter the Gardens from Bruce B Downs one block north of Fowler, turn East on Pine St. & Left at Alumni Drive. Go one block to the Gardens entrance on the left. We will be in the southeast corner of the Gardens.

IMPORTANT: Members bringing plants to sell need to restrict sales to fruiting plants only – no ornamentals or flowers.

Scheduled Speakers/Events:

April 14 & 15: Spring USF Botanical Garden Plant Festival
May 13: Gene Joyner: Unbelievable Acres, W. Palm Beach
June 10: Vicki Parson: The benefits of Neem
July 8: Dr. Futch: Citrus
August 12: Debbie Sims: Wine from tropical fruits

TASTING TABLE MARCH 2007

Coronel	Banana-mango cobbler	Hill	Rice
Ludwig	Chocolate-oatmeal cookies	Smoleny	Peanut butter cookies
Lohn	Valencia oranges	Golden	Bean salad
Branesky	Carmel corn	Engelbrecht	Waldorf salad
Cimafranca	Carambola fruit	Burton	Rum cake
Kirby	Fried plantains	Musgraves	Cottage cheese salad
Ferreira	Potato salad	Scott	Star fruit slices
Heath	Lime squares	Mann	Salad
Reddicliff	Snickers cake, mincemeat pie	Bigelow	Chicken-pork dish
Shigemura	Fruit tarts, mango-black bean salsa	Topping	Fried rice
Sawada	Apple strudel, garlic shrimp yakisoba	Maranto	Black beans & rice
Zmoda	Hot olive pickles	Terenzi	Tiramasu
Novak	Macadamia -coconut bars, 9 layer salad passionfruit cheesecake, mixed fresh, fruit, Juices	Chavez	Carrot salad

Board of Directors Officers: **President:** Fred Engelbrecht
V. President: Bob Heath, Jimmy Lee, Jerry Amyot, Charles Novak
Secretary: Linda Novak
Treasurer: Susan McAveety

Photo Shoot winners:

First Place: Vic Peyron and Roberta Harris (tied for first place)

Second Place: Roberta Harris

A special 'Thanks' to Roberto San Luis, Sharon Pilot, Rose Terenzi, Paul Zmoda, and Fred Engelbrecht for submitting photos. Members present at the March meeting selected their favorite photo from all the photos submitted.

Members' Corner:

Wanted: Budwood from Kent and Glenn Mangos. Also, still needing 1 gallon pots.
 Charles Novak (813) 754-1399 or charles.novak@gmail.com

WHAT'S HAPPENING

Mar-Apr 2007

By PAUL ZMODA

Loquats are ripening. Some are truly delicious. Thinning the flowers at an early stage allows the fruit to attain maximum size and quality. Harvest them when fully ripe, soft and juicy, as they will not improve once picked. Eat and enjoy them fresh out-of-hand or make something good from them. Jams are possible as is fruit leather. Cook them with poultry or pork. If you leave the seeds in when doing so, an amazing taste transformation occurs: they will taste like maraschino cherries, thanks to chemical compounds released by the seeds. Loquats are especially treasured every spring.

Our Orinoco bananas are at their fullest size now and some are turning yellow. These plantain-like bananas are one of the best for frying, while green, to make Spanish-style mofingo or tostones – both garlicky, salty and crispy. Yum. When yellow, Orinocos may be sliced lengthwise and sautéed in butter and garnished with cinnamon, powdered sugar, nutmeg or jelly for a great breakfast or dessert addition.

New Plantings: sweet corn, tomatoes, peppers, basil, Java plums, squashes, gac and watermelons.

* * *

WANTED: RFCI members owning bare expanses of chain link or other suitable fencing in a sunny area on which to plant experimental grape seedlings. I am seeking superior offspring vines from this year's batch. I will plant and maintain until fruiting occurs for evaluation. Fruit will be shared with those members. Contact: Paul Zmoda, 813-932-2469. Flatwoodsfarm@AOL.com



WORLD OF ART FLOWER SHOW

The Tampa Bay Rare Fruit Council participated in The Tampa Federation of Garden Club Circles Spring Flower Show on March 23-25. Charles & Linda Novak and Bob Heath set up our educational exhibit early March 23 for the Show which opened at 2:00 p.m. The show was mostly devoted to flowers and art but two educational exhibits on fruiting plants were displayed. Artists were busy sculpting and painting and displaying their art, and beautiful displays of plant sculptures lined the walls at the Tampa Garden Club. The extent and variety of lovely flowers and ornamental plantings were a pleasure to view. Our exhibit was impressive and received many raves from the judges and other participants, and we received the Educational Award (brown & white ribbon) and the Rosemary Circle Trophy. A special thanks to Al Hendry and Sanda Worsham for helping to man the exhibit and answering the many questions from the public.

FEBRUARY PLANT EXCHANGE

PLANT	DONOR	WINNER
Rangpur Red Lime	Bob Heath	Melody Ludwig
Cabeluda	"	Ed Musgrave
Surinam Cherry	"	Linda Brown
Pineapple	"	Linda Brown
Yellow Passion Fruit	"	Hill
Loquat	"	Melody Ludwig
Beauty Berry	"	?
Orange Berry	"	?
Kadota Fig	"	?
Carissa	Bob Heath	T. Scott
Meyer Lemon	RFCI	Mann
Orlando Tangelo	RFCI	?
Grapefruit Seedlings	Hill	Sandra Worsham
" Rootstock	"	?
Cereus Cactus	Zmoda	?
Cactus (Sawtooth)	S. Saceda-Bigelow	?
Aloe Vera	"	?
Carambola fruit 5 pkgs	J. Cimafranca	Bob Heath
Loquat	Tony Ferreira	?
Black Sapote fruit	"	Dougal Kirby
Kumquat fruit	T. Scott	Hill
Kumquat fruit	"	S. Saceda-Bigelow
Mango	David Burton	Linda Brown
Ginger Plants	B. Reddicliffe	Julio Piatra
Bamboo Palm	Mike Brandt	?
Pomegranate	"	?
Citrus	Vega	T. Worsham
Lemons	"	James Oliver
Aloe	Vega	?
Colombian "Hot Pepper"	David Miller	?
Bind Pepper "Hot"	Banni Miller	?
Lemon Balm Herb	Linda Brown	?
Plumeria	"	James Oliver
Queen Palm	"	?
Loquat	Linda Brown	?
Myers Lemons	Verna Dickey	?
Pink Grapefruit	"	?
Star Fruit	"	Eva Golden
Star Fruit	"	Lillian Smoleny

STRAWBERRIES

By CRAIG CHANDLER

Craig indicated that it was a little ironic that he's come to speak to a Rare Fruit Council about strawberries, which is the most widely distributed fruit crop in the world. He works for the University of Florida out of Gainesville, but he works at a research center that's in southern Hillsborough County, the Gulf Coast Research Center, which has only been in existence for 2 years. Previously he was at a small station between Tampa and Plant City just outside of Dover. He indicated he would like to talk to us about strawberries as a crop, and then give us a little history of the Florida strawberry industry and the development of a program that the University of Florida has developed to help the industry, and look at the objectives and methods of their breeding program.

Craig showed us a map of the world where he indicated again that strawberries are the most widely distributed fruit crop. They are grown in almost every country and even in tropical countries at high elevations. The No. 1 producer of fresh market strawberries in the world is the United States, but the No. 2 producer is Spain, which is sort of the California of Europe; they produce a lot of strawberries starting in February and on into late June & early July. The third largest producer is Japan.

The varieties they have developed at the University of Florida are not only adapted to Florida, but are also being grown in other parts of the world throughout Central and South America, Spain, North Africa, Morocco and Egypt, and are becoming important in Australia. A map of the U.S. showed the major production areas. California, by far, is the largest producer in the U.S., in their coastal valleys all the way up to just south of San Francisco, where they may produce strawberries nearly 12 months of the year. Florida is the second largest producer. California has about 30,000 acres in

production and Florida only about 8000. Other important production areas are North Carolina and New York.

Concerning the development of the modern strawberry, Craig showed us a drawing of the *Fragaria virginiana*, a wild variety that is found throughout eastern North America, all the way into the Rocky Mountains. It has thin leaves and small fruit which are generally quite aromatic. The other parent of the modern strawberry is the *Fragaria chiliensis* which is also native to the U.S. and is found along beaches in California and down in Chile, which is probably where the name *chiliensis* came from. The leaves are thicker, more salt tolerant and drought tolerant than the *virginiana*. The fruit of *chiliensis* tends to be a little larger, and back in the 1700s when the natural hybridization occurred between these two species in some European gardens, the product was a much larger fruit than either parent.

Strawberries are herbaceous, perennial, and can live for a number of years, and they reproduce vegetatively by runners, where every second node puts out a daughter plant.

Craig indicated that most strawberry production in Florida is in Hillsborough County, somewhere between 90 & 95%, in eastern Hillsborough County, although there is some production throughout the state from the panhandle all the way down to Homestead. A lot of strawberries produced in this area are shipped out of state to the major supermarket chains. The reason this is such a primary area for winter fruit production is that we have temperatures and day lengths during the winter for good consistent flowering and fruiting. Strawberry plants like conditions similar to what we humans like. They thrive with temperatures in the mid 50s during the evening and night, and mid 70s during the day, and with day lengths of less than 14

hours, which are conditions we get a good part of the winter. Strawberries have been growing in this area for over 100 years. Farmers started growing them in the Plant City area in the late 1800s and they pretty well used the same cultural system we use today; nothing much has changed in strawberry production. They planted them in late summer and early fall, and grew them on hilled rows just like we do today, but they didn't have the plastic mulch that we use now, so weeds were more of a problem. Strawberries are primarily vegetatively propagated and this is how it's done commercially.

Craig showed us a strawberry nursery in the summer. The mother plants have been set out and we could see they were just beginning to put out some runners and some of the plantlets were sending out roots. Then he showed us what it would look like in the late summer when we have almost a solid mat of plants. The plants are dug, the soil is shaken from the roots, five or six hundred plants are packed in boxes, put on refrigerated trucks and shipped mostly from southern Canada, the area of Ontario & Nova Scotia & Quebec. We also get some plants from the mountain areas of North Carolina. Plants as they are received here have 2 or 3 functional leaves. The roots are planted through a hole in the plastic. A machine is used to make holes in the plastic at the proper spacing and they are planted right through the plastic in the soil underneath. Planting is mostly done in October, which can still be rather warm. The farmers turn on their sprinkler irrigation and run it for 10 to 14 days to get the new plants established, from about 10:00 a.m., depending on the cloud cover, and off again about 5:00 or 6:00 in the evening. After about a week they can start cutting back on the water as the plants become well rooted. The growing cycle starts in September by preparing the land. Planting is throughout the month of October. Peak blooms are from late November & early December to late January & early February. It normally takes about 30 days to go from flowering to ripe fruit. Peak

harvest time is late December or early January & late February on into March.

Next, Craig gave us a little history of the breeding program the University of Florida has had in developing varieties for the Florida industry. Albert Brooks was a plant pathologist and released the first variety for the University in 1952. He called it Florida 90. He used open pollinated seed from the Missionary variety, which was the main variety from about the 1890s till the Florida 90 was released. It was a chance seedling that somebody had found in Virginia. He planted out & grew these seedlings. It was the 90th one that seemed to do the best, which is how the name came about. It was the most important variety through the 1950s, the main variety the growers in Plant City were growing.

Brooks' successor was Charlie Howard, who was also a plant pathologist. Charlie started work at the Dover center in the late 1960s and he released 2 varieties while he was doing the breeding, the Florida Bell in 1975 & Florida Dover in 1979. Both of these had good resistance to crown rot, a disease we see when we try to propagate plants locally. Now we get most plants out of Canada, but back in those days, growers would propagate their own plants right here in Florida and the plants suffered from high mortality through the summer. The main culprit was crown rot. With these two varieties, the growers were able to propagate their plants without a lot of loss. Unfortunately, these 2 varieties had flaws as far as quality goes. They weren't grown to a great extent because Florida growers had to compete with fruit from California, which had larger size & better appearance.

Craig was hired in 1987 with a background in plant breeding, which worked well with Charlie Howard's background. He came into a facility where germ plasma was available; he didn't have to start from scratch. The first variety Craig released was Sweet Charlie; the cross was actually made by Charlie Howard, so they decided it would be appropriate to

name it after Charlie, who died in 1991 from cancer. The released it in 1992 in his honor. Sweet Charlie was quite a success, being important in our industry for about 10 years till 2002, but it suffers a little from firmness and shelf life, especially when the weather gets warm. In 2000 they released another variety called Festival; officially, Strawberry Festival. Because the Strawberry Festival in Plant City has donated quite a bit of money to the research center, this variety was named in honor of it. It has been very successful; about 60% of the Florida acreage is planted in this variety. The latest variety they have released is Winter Dawn, released in 2005, which is probably the earliest ripening of any varieties they have released.

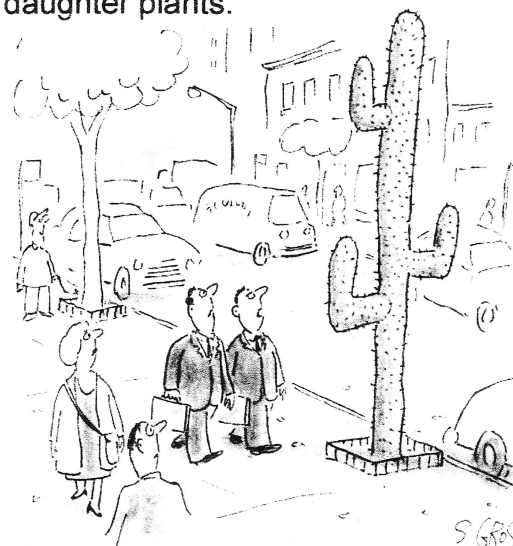
Craig showed us a picture of where he started out. It is in Springhead, which is to the southeast of Plant City, really a one-man show. The only person doing strawberry research in this area, he handled disease problems & also insects & nematode problems. In 1964 the university system built the facility in Dover, which is about 7 miles west of Plant City. Hillsborough County donated about 20 acres of land where Craig started to work in 1987. The facility was originally called Strawberry Lab, but the name was recently changed to Gulf Coast Research & Education Center of Dover. Today he's down on County Road 672, south of Riverview & north of Sun City Center. Again, Hillsborough County donated about 500 acres to the university, where they built a \$15 million research center. It includes offices and laboratory buildings and some other buildings, an excellent facility. It represents a consolidation between the Dover center & a research center that was in Bradenton. At that center they worked on vegetables & ornamentals. Now at the present center, they're working on strawberries, ornamental crops, tomatoes, peppers & several kinds of cucurbits. In Gainesville food scientists, physiologists concerned with shelf life & a molecular biologist all work on strawberries.

Over the years there have been a number of California varieties that have been important to Florida growers. The problem with the California varieties in Florida is they tend to be late or produce the majority of their fruit in March or April when prices are low & they tend to be more susceptible to fungal diseases than our Florida varieties.

This season, Festival represents about 60% of our crop in Hillsborough County. Pleasure is the number 2 variety, which was developed by a private breeder whose base of operation is in the Naples area with about 20% of the acreage. The remaining 20% is planted in a mixture of different varieties.

Sweet Charlie is still important in some other areas of the world where the fruit would have to be shipped long distance. It is grown in Egypt, India & China.

The flesh of the strawberry is really just a modified stem. There is a receptacle on the stem that becomes the strawberry itself, the part we really enjoy eating. The true fruit is what we would normally call the seeds on the outside of the strawberry. They are actually single seeded fruit. The tiny fruit has a hard outer coating and the inside is a single seed. The seeds are spread right on top of the germinating medium, not covered, so they require light and moisture to germinate. After the little plantlets have several leaves, they are transplanted into individual containers, where they go to a field nursery to produce their daughter plants.



"I'm starting to get concerned about global warming."

RECIPE

LEMON SQUARES

2 cups all purpose flour
 ½ cup granulated sugar
 1 ½ sticks margarine or butter at room temperature
 4 eggs
 ½ cup all purpose flour, sifted
 ½ tsp baking soda
 2 cans (14 oz. each) sweetened condensed milk
 ½ cup lemon juice

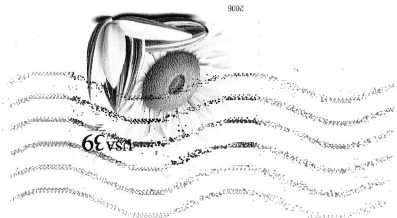
Preheat oven to 350 deg. F. For the crust, combine flour, sugar and margarine in a large bowl until thoroughly mixed. Spread evenly over bottom of lightly greased 9" x 13" baking pan and press in place. Bake in conventional oven 15 minutes or until just turning brown at the edges. Prepare topping while crust bakes. Whisk eggs in mixing bowl and stir in flour and baking soda. Add condensed milk and fruit juice and mix well. Pour over crust and return pan to oven. Bake 20-25 minutes more until topping feels firm. Remove from oven and allow to cool before cutting into squares.



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