



RFCI NEWSLETTER

TAMPA BAY CHAPTER of the
RARE FRUIT COUNCIL INTERNATIONAL INC

MARCH 2008

EDITORS: BOB HEATH, PAULA HARDWICK, CHARLES NOVAK, LINDA NOVAK
 PRESIDENT: FRED ENGELBRECHT WEBSITE: www.rarefruit.org (CHARLES NOVAK)
 MEETINGS ARE HELD THE 2nd SUNDAY OF THE MONTH @ 2:00 PM.
 @ THE TAMPA GARDEN CLUB, 2629 BAYSHORE BLVD, TAMPA

NEXT MEETING: MARCH 9

PROGRAM: OUR SPEAKERS FOR THE MARCH MEETING WILL BE BOB & VIVIAN MURRAY from the Tree House Nursery on Pine Island in Ft Myers. This is the biggest rare fruit nursery in central Florida. Bob is an authority on the propagation and growing of a large variety of tropical fruiting trees. This should be an interesting and informative program. We will also enjoy our fabulous banquet table, great plant raffle & farmers market, as well as interesting camaraderie.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

Feb-Mar 2008

By PAUL ZMODA

In this newsletter, I've decided to share one of the best kept secrets of all time with all of you rare (and not so rare) fruit growers. To begin with, all of you readers file your federal income taxes year after year and probably with some griping about your hard earned money going "bye-bye". You will be elated to learn that some of our tax dollars have been going to fund a very important agricultural program which allows us to get something in return. This is the National Plant Germ Plasm System (NPGS). The NPGS is operated by the United State Dept. of Agriculture, Agriculture Research Service (ARS).

This program serves all humans in very important ways. The many ARS research stations across the USA are used as germ plasm repositories – genetic collections of plants and seeds from all over the world. There, they are studied and held in case they are needed to replant elsewhere should a calamity occur such as diseases or other natural disasters. Material is also available to people, such as ourselves, to grow and study.

Since these operations are funded by us, the taxpayers, we should be aware that we are entitled to request these plant materials (if available) for our own use, free of additional charges, including express shipping! Be advised that:

- 1) Plant material is usually harvested and shipped only a few times a year, and
- 2) Many times you will receive fresh cuttings or budwood, so you will be responsible for either rooting them yourself or grafting them onto suitable root stocks.

I have been utilizing this valuable resource for many years, obtaining and successfully growing many obscure cultivars of olives, pomegranates, pistachio nuts, figs and others.

To get started, fire up your computer and go to WWW.ARS-GRIN.GOV. This is a huge site, so be prepared to navigate it carefully and thoroughly as there are over 450,000 accessions to locate.

There you have it. So stop complaining about paying taxes and start getting your money's worth.

New plantings: bulbing fennel, pole beans, cucumbers & Thai olive.

Scheduled Programs/Speakers/Events:

March 9: Bob & Vivian Murray, Treehouse Nursery, Pine Island.
 "Lychees & Longans"
April 12-13: Spring USF Botanical Garden Plant Festival
May 11: Gene Joyner, Unbelievable Acres, West Palm Beach

Citrus Celebration 2008: Our 7th Citrus Celebration at the Florida State Fair was very successful. The weather was perfect so it was a busy day at the fair. We were very busy cutting the citrus (about 70 varieties) into sample size servings and squeezing orange juice. Approximately 900 bowls of fruit and 300 cups of juice were enjoyed by the public. It was the most successful Citrus Celebration in the 11 years we have been hosting this event (4 years at the USF Botanical Garden). A huge "THANKS" to everyone who helped make it a success (donating fruit, picking and washing fruit, delivering the fruit to the fairgrounds and helping with the event on Sunday). We received many favorable comments from the public. We have a great club! So many members are willing to help by donating their time and energy to club tree sales and events.



Our exhibit received Fifth place in the Plant Society competition. Each society receives a set-up premium of \$250. Fifth place receives an additional \$75 and the yellow rosette ribbon. **Thanks** to Roberta and Steve Harris, Thom Scott, Bill Vega, Charles & Linda Novak for setting up the exhibit and to all the members who manned the exhibit. A special 'thanks' to member Jene VanButzel (Jene's Nursery in St. Petersburg) for supplying most of the fruit trees. The public is always interested in our display of fruit trees and the unusual fruits we exhibit.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS ELECTION

At the March meeting the general membership present will elect the Board of Directors for a one-year term. The Board then elects the executive officers. Directors must be willing and able to make a significant commitment of time to the club. The Board meets monthly or at such times deemed necessary. The Board is responsible for the policies, finances and direction of the Chapter. Therefore, it is important for Board Members to attend as many meetings as possible. The Board of Directors meetings are open to the entire membership and members are encouraged to attend.

The nominating committee has selected the following members for your consideration as the next Board of Directors:

Fred Engelbrecht

Jimmy Lee

Bob Heath

Andrew Hendrickson

Paul Branesky

Thom Scott

Charles Novak

Sally Lee

Jerry Amyot

Linda Novak

Verna Dickey

Judith Cimafranca

Susan McAveety

Teri Worsham

Additional nominations will be accepted from the floor at the March meeting. Please plan to attend and vote for your Board of Directors.

Environmental control

The main problem in propagation is to ensure survival of the propagated material (be it seed, cutting or graft) until it establishes as a new young plant. If the correct material has been used at the start, and as long as any treatments or cuts have been made correctly, then success is directly related to the control of the environment. The quicker the regenerative processes can be induced the less chance there is for things to go wrong.

In plant propagation there are two environments: the aerial environment, which can be broken down into humidity, temperature, gaseous balance and light transmission; and the environment of the medium (soil and compost), which covers temperature, moisture status, aeration and its reaction (acidity, alkalinity). Any equipment therefore should be measured in relation to the effect it has on these factors.

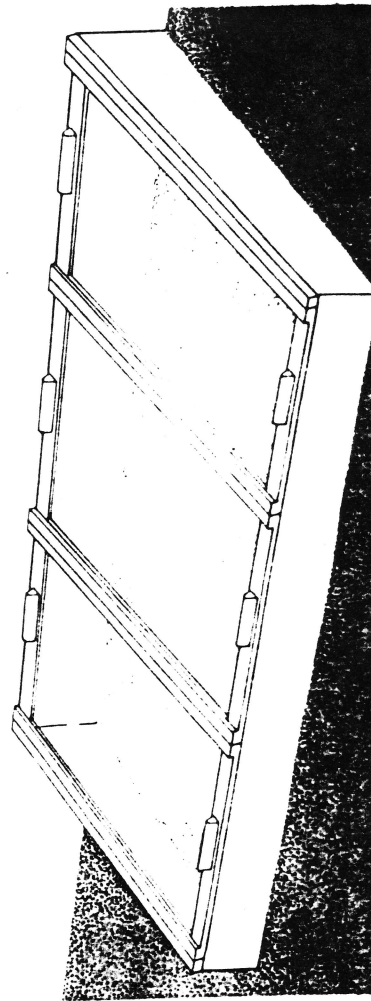
An ideal environment is one that allows minimum water loss from the plant material, cool air temperatures, adequate light penetration for photosynthesis, a normal atmospheric balance between compost and air, good drainage and warm soil/compost temperatures with a neutral acidity/alkalinity reaction. The degree to which a particular system of environmental control operates will limit the propagation techniques that can be used successfully within it. In general, the "softer" or less hardy the plant material the greater will be the degree of environmental control needed to achieve success. The vagaries of the normal climate are too great for all but the easiest and hardiest plants to be propagated successfully outdoors.

Cold frames

To provide initial control over the environment, place a box with a lid of glass on ordinary soil. This cold frame environment helps to increase soil temperatures, reduce temperature fluctuation, maintain humidity and allow light penetration, and it can be used for the propagation of a wide range of hardy plants. Its main disadvantage, which is shared with all enclosed environments, is that air temperatures build up when conditions are sunny. This necessitates either airing the frame to reduce the temperature, and thereby losing humidity, or shading the glass to cut down the light input, and so reducing photosynthesis.

There are many plastics substitutes used in place of glass, but because of their heat light transmission characteristics they are less satisfactory in the late autumn to spring period as they do not conserve heat so effectively as glass.

The most manageable cold frame to construct is made with "Dutch lights," which are single panes of glass held in separate wooden frames 4 ft 11 in long by 2 ft 6 1/2 in wide. These can be laid side by side across a base frame with a distance between backboard and frontboard of 4 ft 9 in. For propagation the backboard is best made at a height of about 12 in and the frontboard at 9 in. The slope of the roof should be pitched in a southerly direction. The cold frame can be made more reliable by improved sealing of any cracks in the structure and by double glazing with two layers of "lights"—the lid of a cold frame being called a "light."



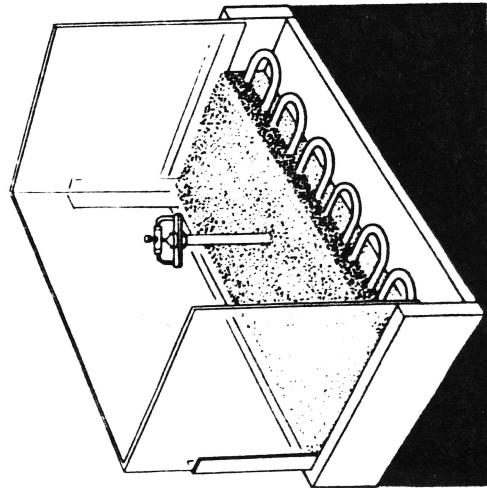
Greenhouses

The next step in the sequence of environmental control is the greenhouse, where slightly more sophisticated pieces of equipment for environmental control can be used. Greenhouses can, of course, be of a wide variety of shapes and sizes. Wooden-framed greenhouses are expensive to purchase, maintain and keep clean. Metal greenhouses are less expensive, cheaper to maintain and easier to keep clean, but unless they have an adequate internal structure they are subject to considerable distortion and damage if exposed to high-velocity winds.

A closed case, which is a frame with a lid of glass in a greenhouse, provides a high-temperature system for propagation of house plants and less hardy subjects. Accurate control of temperature can be attained by installing a thermostatically controlled soil-heating cable, which will provide bottom heat, into some sand at the base of the closed case.

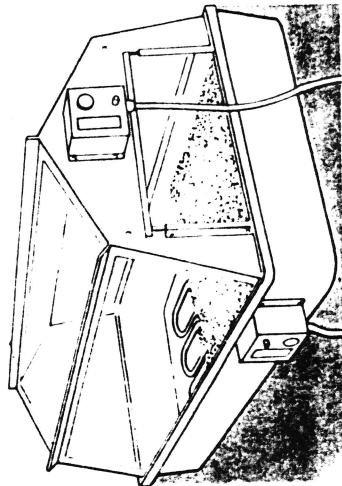
Mist propagation units

The ultimate environmental control is provided by a mist unit. This is an open system that automatically maintains the moisture level while allowing the full penetration of light and the use of bottom heat without an increase in air temperature. However, such a system requires both electricity and water in the greenhouse.



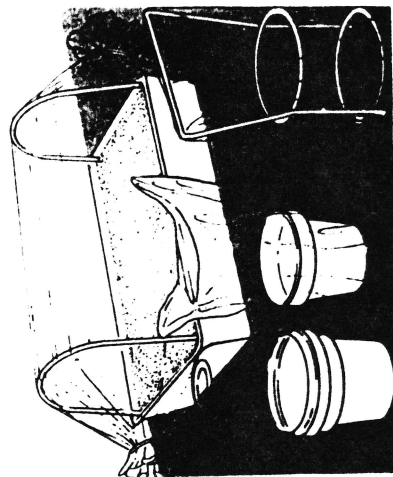
Propagators

The alternative compromise is the so-called "propagator." This is a portable unit and can be used either in the greenhouse or indoors. It provides that adequate light is available. It consists of a fiberglass base fitted with a thermostat and heating cables and a Plexiglas-type dome, which provides the closed environment. All sorts of variations are available so make sure that the propagator you buy is sufficiently large for your needs.



Polyethylene tents and tunnels

At the other extreme is a cheap and simple arrangement that provides a sufficiently effective closed environment for easily propagated plants. Place a polyethylene bag over the top of a pot or tray, and support it either by one or two bamboo rods or by a loop of wire with an end stuck in the compost; seal with a rubber band. Make a tunnel over plants outdoors by supporting polyethylene sheeting with wire and then sealing the ends.



THE SUGAR APPLE

(*Annona Squamosa*)

With the exception of the little known Ilama, the sugar apple is one of the best of the tropical annonas. In its climatic requirements, it resembles the bullock's heart and the soursop, rather than the subtropical cherimoya. In precocity and productiveness, it excels all these species. The sugar apple is more widely disseminated throughout the tropics than any other species of annonas and in many regions is an important fruit. Particularly is it esteemed in India where it is extensively grown. Vincenzo Maria wrote of it in 1672, "The pulp is very white, tender, delicate and so delicious that it unites to agreeable sweetness a most delightful fragrance like rose water...and if presented to one unacquainted with it, he would certainly take it for blanc-mange". The tree is much smaller than most other species of the genus, its maximum height being 15 to 20 feet. Like the cherimoya, it is semi-deciduous. The leaves resemble those of a reticulata except in their smaller size; they are lanceolate or oblong-lanceolate in form, acute or shortly acuminate at the apex and acute at the base, 2-1/2 to 4" long, pale green on both surfaces and glabrate or nearly so, except for the sparsely pubescent petiole. The flowers which are produced singly or in clusters of 2 to 4, resemble a reticulata. The fruit is heart shaped or ovate, 2 to 3" in diameter, yellowish green in color. The food value of this species is principally due to the richness in sugars, glucose and sucrose being found in almost equal proportions. This fruit thrives in this section of Florida, comes true to the seed and is easy to grow, will fruit in 2 to 3 years with care. Experience proves it fruits sooner and grows longer when grafted to custard apple or pond apple.

OUR CLUB

by BOB HEATH

I never cease to be amazed at what a great club we have. Actually, it's great because of the wonderful membership. It's the enthusiasm and participation in all our functions that leaves me amazed and filled with pride to be a member. When I see participation in functions like the Citrus Tasting at the Florida State Fair, I just want to shake their hands and give a cheer and thanks to all the members who devoted their entire Sunday, Feb. 10, and all the hours in the days before the event in preparation. This is what makes our Rare Fruit Council exceptional – our members. My heart sings when I think of all the friends our club has given to me over the years, and the richness of the hours spent with them. This is one of the great joys of my life and I am thankful for every member who has become a part of my life.

MEMBERS CORNER

FOR SALE:

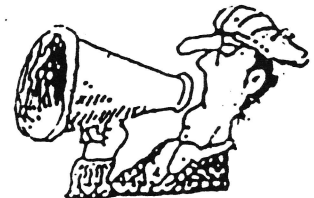
12 foot Akee tree in 15 gal. pot. Contact Anne Pidgeon @ 813-833-2545.

WANTED:

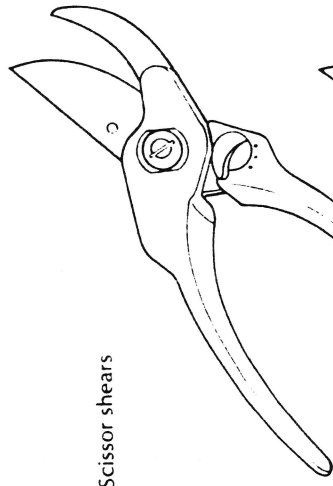
Sally Lee is interested in obtaining an elephant aloe plant. Please call Sally @ 813-982-9359.

FREE: Frozen Muscadine grapes for eating or making jelly. Call Cora Coronel @ 727-403-1756.

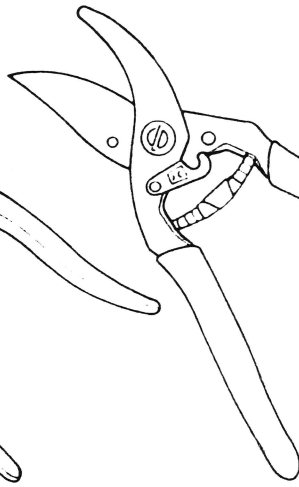
LANDSCAPING: At Florida Yard Fandango, March 8, from 9 am to 3 pm – Plant & Craft Fair – MOSI – 4801 E Fowler Ave – Free admission.



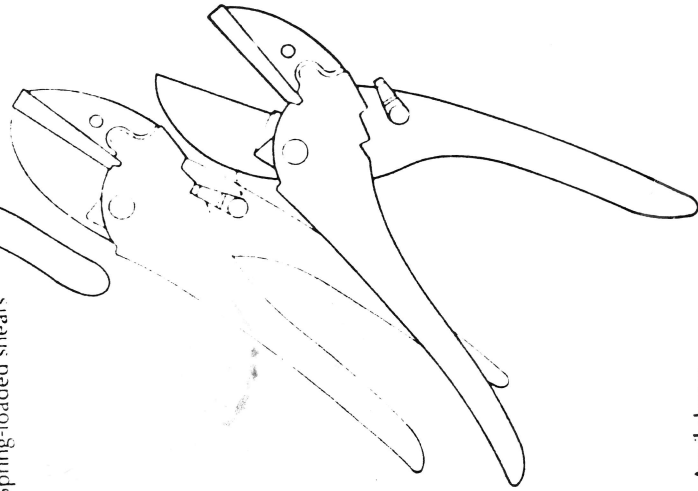
Shears



Scissor shears



Spring-loaded shears



Anvil shears

Although a sharp knife has always been regarded as the gardener's main cutting instrument for propagation, modern practice makes just as much use of a suitably designed pair of shears; and where these can be used, they are much more effective than a knife because they are quick and easy to use and because they are also less liable to cause injury to the plant material.

A pair of shears can not only cope with the final cut on any stem that is firm and hard enough to cut cleanly but can also be used for the initial cutting of softer stems, which may at the final stage need to be trimmed carefully with a knife or razor blade.

There are two basic shear designs: the "anvil" type and the "scissor" type. Anvil shears have one sharp blade, usually hollow ground on both sides, which cuts through the stem by "crushing" it against a broad flat surface (the anvil). Scissor shears also have one sharpened blade, but normally only the internal surface is ground flat. This blade cuts by rotating past the anvil blade as in a conventional pair of scissors. The scissor types are preferable simply because they make a cleaner cut and cause less crushing and bruising in the region of the cut. Other shear designs such as those with a ratchet action are not necessary for propagation.

When choosing a pair of shears ensure that their size is convenient, the handles feel comfortable, and that they are easy to operate. It is best to choose a spring-loaded pair so that they reopen automatically after each cut—it is tedious to have to keep opening the blades for each incision. Select a pair with a catch that keeps the shears closed when out of use so they are not dangerous and the cutting edge is protected. Some types of shears have a sap groove, which helps to prevent the blades sticking. Like all tools for propagation, a pair of shears should ideally be kept only for this purpose to prevent the blades becoming prematurely blunt and ineffective.

As with knives it is usually possible to judge shears on the basis of cost: expensive types are normally well designed, easy to dismantle and reassemble and have good-quality steel blades that retain their cutting edge for a long period.

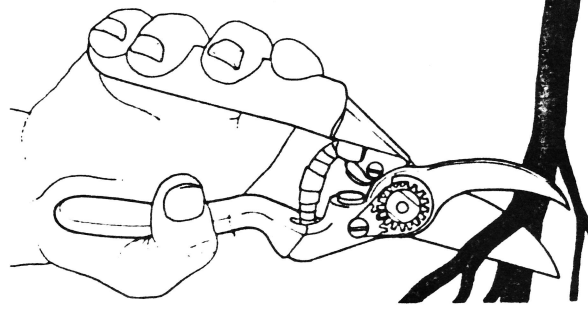
Care and maintenance

Shears, more than most tools, require constant maintenance if they are to remain effective. After each session wipe the blades with a solvent such as gasoline or carbon tetrachloride and/or fine emery paper to clean off resins, plant juices and residues that otherwise may quickly impair the cutting edges. Then wipe the blades with light oil to prevent rusting, and similarly oil all the moving parts to keep them in good working order.

The cutting blade will need periodical sharpening to maintain its edge, but this will be fairly infrequent if a good-quality pair was obtained initially and the blades are kept clean. Usually, good-quality shears are also marginally adjustable to maintain a good cutting action.

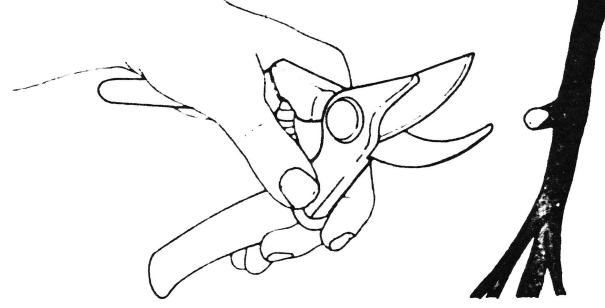
The method of sharpening varies, but usually the shears are dismantled and the blade portion sharpened like a knife. In some makes the blade is disposable and is replaced

Correct cut



Place the sharp cutting blade at the base of the material to be cut so it is flush with the main stem. Squeeze decisively.

Incorrect cut



Never make a cut with the anvil blade flush with the main stem as it will leave a snag.

Cutting with anvil shears



Squeeze the sharp blade through the stem onto the anvil blade to make a clean cut without bruising and crushing.

rather than sharpened. Always keep the leaflet that accompanies the tool and follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully. If no instructions are supplied, take the shears to an expert for sharpening.

Making a clean cut

When using shears it is important to notice where the cut is actually being made; the anvil blade is often quite thick and it is not always possible to see the actual cut when making it. Also, ensure that any cut is made with the anvil blade away from the proposed cut surface so any bruising is not incorporated in the propagated material.

To make a clean cut, decisively squeeze the shear blades together. Never force shears to make a cut as this merely bends the blades, damages the hinge and probably the plant material as well. When dealing with a thick, hard stem move the blades round a bit after each cut until they cut through it.

GARDENING CALENDAR FOR MARCH

This month you should give your fruit trees their spring feeding. Those who were fortunate to sustain minimum damage in the freeze, especially mangoes & avocados, should have small fruit set. Be sure to spray with fungicide so the fruit sets well and develops quality fruit. Many tropical fruits such as Surinam cherry, kei apple, jaboticaba, cherry of the Rio Grande, figs, grumichama and pitomba are beginning to bloom. Those having citrus should have fruit forming. Be alert for signs of insects, aphids & white fly, and to protect rust, spray with copper fungicide when the fruit is not larger than a pea. Use a Sticker-Spreader to secure more even coverage.

A GUIDE TO TROPICAL FRUIT TREES & VINES, continued...

120. *Myrciaria floribunda* - Guava berry

Evergreen tree to 30 feet, native to Mexico and Central America. Leaves to 3 inches long. Flowers are white, 2 to 5 in a cluster. Roundish fruits are about 1/2 inch in diameter and red or yellow in color. Yellow pulp is eaten fresh, used in jellies, preserves and to flavor alcoholic beverages. Plants are started by seed and will produce fruit in 6 to 8 years.

121. *Pimenta officinalis (ditaica)* - Allspice

Tree to 40 feet, native to Central America and the West Indies. Leaves to 6 inches in length have prominent veins beneath. White flowers 1/4 inch across. Dark brown fruit is about 1/4 inch in diameter. Allspice is the dried unripe fruit. New plants are started by seed.



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