

RFCI

August 2024

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

<http://www.rarefruit.org>

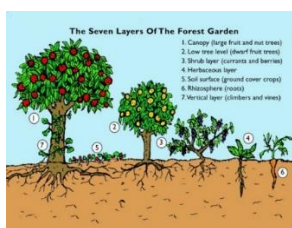
Tampa.Bay.RFCI@gmail.com

<http://www.facebook.com/TampaBayChapterRareFruitCouncilIntlInc>

Meetings are held the second Sunday, 1:00 P.M.
at the HCC Brandon Campus, Room 206/208
10451 Nancy Watkins Dr., Tampa, FL 33619

∞ Upcoming Programs and Events ∞

August 11th: Food Forests with Amanda Pike, author of “Transforming Florida Yards” will discuss “Food Forestry: How to Create an Eden with Perennial Plants”, creating beauty and bounty in your yard, and making your garden space work for you. Food forests are an approach to edible landscaping designed to be both beautiful and prolific. There are many layers of edible crops from canopy trees all the way down to the mycelial layer below the soil. Whether you are seeking year-round, fresh, healthy food, food security, diversity, or seeking to understand how gardening, nature and wellness all work together, this topic will be of interest to you. Amanda will examine permaculture as a home practice, the many plants that can be used, and how to get growing!



1:00pm – 2:00pm — Social hour
2:00pm – 2:30pm — Potluck – Please feel free to bring a covered dish
2:30pm – 3:30pm — Introduction/Speaker
3:30pm – 4:00pm — Raffle/Closing – Please feel free to bring a plant for the raffle
4:00pm – 5:00pm — HCC Campus Food Forest development and maintenance (lower left quadrant of map below (use parking lot #3 for convenient access)

FIELD TRIP UPDATE!! Saturday August 3, the bus leaves HCC Brandon at 8am cost is \$40 per active member (nonrefundable) We are now offering an additional stop in Pinellas County! The pickup location is the Publix at 120 Carillon Parkway St Petersburg FL. This pickup stop is **near to the gardens** and perfect for Pinellas County and Tampa residents.

Click below for quick and easy pay with Square!

https://checkout.square.site/merchant/3FWD4EGDQ00YC/checkout/GRM7YPXHV4LFBO4ZQCDNFVST?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMCTAAAR3QjbmaEIK3LQxZ6IIKGC-1IkypSNX4sW3aiuAjie0R-qrLXbgezoC4Fw_aem_sTBaXg3mJhuw-LYO5snPEg

Vice President needed:



The Club is seeking a new Vice President. If you would like to become more involved in the Club at an executive capacity, and want to learn more about what being a VP requires, stay for the Board meeting at August's meeting, and express your interest.

President: Dylan Chadwell; Vice President: ; Secretary: KC Gonzalez;
Treasurer: Susan McAveety; Newsletter/Membership: Denise Provencher



With speaker Ko Chang

South Florida dragonfruit expert Ko Chang presented an excellent discussion on dragonfruit. Cuttings were available of many varieties, as well as fruits for tasting. Discussion focused on how to grow dragonfruit plants successfully in Florida.

Some key points:

There are several types of dragonfruit:

Hylocereus undatus (white fruit), *Hylocereus polyrhizus* or *costaricensis* (red fruits), and *Selenicereus megalanthus* (yellow fruit),

The fruits come in a variety of colors ranging from white flesh to pinks, reds, purples. Even the flowers and skins of the fruits can range in colors as well, with some flowers appearing in very vibrant colors.

Flavors can range from more bland to tart, or sweet, with complex tropical tones.

A Brix Refractometer is used to measure the sweetness of the fruit.

The taste is always better when you grow your own, as fruit can be harvested at the proper time of ripeness, which is not done for fruit you buy in the store.



Propagating:

Cuttings are the preferred method of propagating dragonfruit, as fruiting will be quicker than from seed, and you will be certain of the variety you are planting. It is not the length of the cutting, but the dark green color that is best, as well as vigor. Small, yellowish cuttings can be used for grafting.

Growing from seed will yield unique new varieties, as they will not grow true to variety.

How to plant the cutting:

Ko sets the end of cutting just on the soil, and secures in place with a bamboo pole. As the roots are so shallow, the cutting does not need to be set in to the soil much at all.

Frames and support structures are very varied in style and can be made at home using wood, pvc, even wire or concrete. One can even set the whole structure on wheels so the plant can be moved in event of cold weather.

Countless pictures abound on the internet for ideas on this. Just be sure to build it strong!!!

Secure your plant as it grows on the support. Aerial roots will secure themselves to the support for stability. Keep the height reasonable for reaching the plant to prune, hand-pollinate, and harvest, usually 4 feet in height.

As this height is reached, begin bending and securing the plant in a balanced way around the structure to get the branches to grow out and down for fruiting.

Plants can even be grown in pots on a shelf or stump. They will actually fruit quicker this way!

Always be sure to **sterilize your tools** in between pruning each plant to help curb spreading of diseases, and fungus.

Soil –

Ko recommends **no** compost, bark mulch, or heavy organic matter be used for planting dragonfruit. These items tend to break down, compact, and cause rot. Dragonfruit are very shallow rooted, and do not need deep pots, but do need sharp drainage. Ko uses Turfill, a silica based sand, as his favorite base product. Any clean, coarse sand product will work as well. Additives can be any of the following: perlite (#3 is best), pumice, peat moss, earthworm castings, coco coir, biochar, blood or bone meal, or even Turface or SafeTSorb. You can select the best balance of ingredients for your growing situation.

He does NOT use wood chips, soil, or compost.

Fertilizer:

A bloom-booster just before bloom-time can enhance flowering, such as Super-bloom.

An all around fertilizer for fruiting plants can be used as well.

Epsom salts or magnesium sulfate, can help with yellowing, such as with sun-burn, to green the plant up again.

Self-sterile vs. self-fertilizing:

Varieties can be self-fertilizing (you don't need another variety), or self-sterile (another variety is needed for cross pollination). You can hand-fertilize dragonfruit fairly easily, as the flowers are so large.

Hand-pollinating:

Flowers open at night, and the best time to pollinate them is about 1 or 2 hours after they open as the pollen will be dry and fluffy. Use a fine paint brush or make-up brush.

As fruits are growing, they can be protected from animals with fruit mesh bags or clear plastic snap-over containers.

Spicyexotics.com website is loaded with pictures of many different varieties, as well as information on whether the variety is self-fertile or not, flavor information, production and growing information. This very helpful guide will assist you in selecting varieties with the characteristics you want.

Facebook has quite a few sites on regarding dragonfruit, both home growing and commercial, private and public groups, too many to list here. Joining one of these can help in finding cuttings, and information on growing.



Ko Change (L) with Club President Dylan Chadwell



Members enjoying the tasting.



Many Varieties and flavors to choose from.



Using the Brix meter to check the sweetness level of the fruit.

Key to an Excellent Lychee Harvest

Write-up and pictures by George Campani

Are crows getting your Lychees? After years of patience and hard work are crows, squirrels, or other animals having a good time harvesting your Lychee Tree? WHAT A PAIN! In order that I can pick some lychees off my tree, I have for two years been trying to protect my lychee harvest with the “**Citrus Tree Defenders**” (a protective screen covering AKA screen bag) ‘designed’ for protecting young citrus trees from the Asian Citrus Psyllid. Even though the Tree Defenders are not designed for protecting fruit from critters (animals); I have tried defending my Lychee Tree harvest with the Tree Defender’s protective covering.



This year I began installing the protective covering two weeks or so before the fruit matures. Since my lychee tree is too big to be covered by one “Tree Defender” bag; I installed three “Tree Defender” bags over three large branches. The tree was not totally covered; nevertheless, a lot of the lychees were protected.

It should be noted that the protective screen is temporary protection, and it will not stop gnawing animals, but might give you extra time to help with ripening. Also, you might still have to pick lychees a little early to help save your harvest, but you should have a better chance of success with harvesting some fruit.

While there is “no sure method” (that anyone has told me) for protecting their lychee harvest from critters; nevertheless, I venture on, year to year and this year’s result was not bad—see photos!

So, if you have leftover Tree Defenders after you protected your young citrus trees, you might have some success with finding another use!



See the large limbs loaded with fruit covered separately by the Defenders. Plenty of fruit made it safely to harvest time!

☞ What's Happening ☞

by Paul Zmoda

I don't know what grows faster – the grass or our fruit trees. I spend quite a bit of time cutting the “grass”, actually various grasses and weeds, at this time of year. Since the rainy season has started, all of the other plants are doing much better than before where I dragged the hose around giving struggling trees their ration of water to just keep them alive.

I brought some java plums to taste at the last meeting. This tree that I grew from a seed over twenty years ago, finally decided that this was to be the year of a decent crop. The fruit, which look like ripe, black olives have an interesting flavor – astringent - yet not bad. I once made a real nice red vinegar with their juice.

A quick, strong thunderstorm broke one of our banana plants. The hanging fruit were, fortunately, very close to mature. I believe it is in the cavendish group, possibly “Williams”. I used many of the green bananas cooked until they began to turn yellow when they were best eaten raw. Store bananas can't compare.

Dragonfruit cacti are flowering well now, a massive crop of longans is growing heavy, and a planting of tropical corn is growing at a surprising rate of seven inches per day.

Our canistel tree, now nineteen years old, finally made many flowers after I drove some nails into the trunks.



Photo: Paul Zmoda –



Photo: Bryon Provencher

Here is a perfect example of why you do not want to plant a tree with its roots encircling the pot. When this ylang-ylang tree passed away due to a freeze, it was removed, and one could clearly see that in the 4 years time it had been in the ground, the roots that were severely crowded in the container when the tree was planted, had never been able to grow properly. This poor tree belonged to a neighbor who had gotten the tree in a 30 gallon container from a nursery. It had been in the mark-down section. It may be wise to check the roots first on such bargain plants.

∞ Club Notes ∞

Re: Potluck foods: Please label ingredients in your dish to assist those with food allergies to know whether something is safe for them to eat or not. Thank you!

We value your feedback! Feel free to submit your thoughts and ideas on how the Club is doing, how it can be improved, what things you would like to see happen, and of course let us know where the Club is doing well. Use the QR code, or Follow the link: <https://forms.gle/mm8AhGsDaBCTfehG7>



Got ideas for field trips? Gardens, food forests, production, farms, etc. to visit?

Let us know here, and we will look into it.

Also let us know whether you would like day trips, or overnight trips, or longer.

Use this QR code, or contact KC at email: kcgonzalez24@gmail.com

If you have any photos, videos, or other material you would like to have posted on the Club's social media site, please contact Kiki at kikiinthegarden@gmail.com Please include the name of the person to be credited, and a bit of information on the item being sent.

Always appreciated: Member contributions to the newsletter! What a great way to share what you are doing in your garden with other members, learn what other members are growing, and get your questions answered. Your submissions for the newsletter, pictures, notes of interest, events, tips, recipes, questions, etc. are especially needed - please send them to Tampa.Bay.RFCI@gmail.com Submissions for the next newsletter due by: **August 22nd**.

∞ Membership information ∞

NEW MEMBERS

Download and fill out a membership application from: <https://rarefruit.org/membership/>, and send with check or money order for \$20 made out to Tampa Bay RFCI to:
Tampa Bay RFCI, 12722 Prosser Rd., Dade City, FL 33525

RENEWING MEMBERS

Send check or money order for \$20 made out to Tampa Bay RFCI and mail to:
Tampa Bay RFCI, 12722 Prosser Rd., Dade City, FL 33525

Both new and renewing members can also make a secure payment using Square. See the October posting link on our Facebook page, or the link on our Website.



The objectives of The Tampa Bay Rare Fruit Council International:

To inform the public about the merits and uses of fruits common to this region and encourages the cultivation, collection, propagation and growth of fruits that are exotic or unusual to west central Florida. The club also encourages the development of new fruit varieties, cooperating with local and foreign agricultural agencies.

Tampa Bay RFCI
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Dade City, FL 33525