



RFCI

April 2025

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

Meetings unless otherwise noted are held at:
The Oaks at St. Mark's Event Venue.
13312 Cain Road Tampa, FL 33625

<http://www.rarefruit.org>

Tampa.Bay.RFCI@gmail.com

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

∞ Upcoming Programs and Events ∞



April 13, Jonathan Crane will be our speaker. Dr. Crane is associate Center Director, and tropical fruit specialist at the Tropical Research and Education Center in South Florida where he develops educational extension programs on tropical fruit, and teaches courses on tropical fruit production. Topic not available prior to newsletter publication.

NOTE: The Oaks venue was unavailable for this date, so we will be meeting back at the **Unity North Tampa Church, 19520 Holly Ln, Lutz, FL 33558** for this one meeting.

Special start time 1:30pm.

∞ Welcome New Members ∞

Ariel Rodriquez	Riverview
Osiris Sanchez	Valrico
Timothy Robinson	Lakeland
Abraham Stern	Lutz
Doug & April Reese	St. Petersburg
Irene Lauria	New Port Richey
Regina Carnell	New Port Richey
Maureen Mathieson	Trinity
Vikki Peeler	Tampa

President: TBD; Vice President: TBD; 2nd VP: Paul Branesky, Secretary: Hillary Cosenza;
Treasurer: Susan McAveety; Newsletter/Membership: Denise Provencher

A Passion for Passionfruit

Speaker Paul Zmoda



Club member Paul Zmoda spoke about one of his gardening passions at March's meeting; passionfruit. Paul is a life-long gardener, learning to graft in 1966, and growing all kinds of fruits and vegetables here in Tampa after relocating from New Jersey in 1977. He joined the Tampa Bay Chapter of the Rare Fruit in 1990, and served as President in 1995. Paul's extensive experience and passion for growing fruits is evident when he speaks, and he loves to share his knowledge with others. Paul and his wife Luisa live on 5 acres in Riverview on Flatwoods Farm, where they grow many fruits and vegetables for their own use. His specializations are grapes, passionfruit, persimmons, and grafting.

Here are some key points from Paul's talk.



The story of how passionfruit got its name is an interesting one, as it was believed that the passionflower was sent by God to illuminate the story of Christ. The many complex and beautiful parts of the flower seemed to align to tell the story so well.

The beauty of passionflowers rivals that of orchids, but the flowers only last one day. Colors include purples, whites, even red.

The fruit is botanically a berry, full of seeds surrounded by juicy arils, with an external coating that can be soft, leathery, or hard.

Edible types of passionfruit are varieties of *Passiflora edulis*. Fruits are yellow or purple when ripe.

The fruit is not edible until fully ripe, as there are toxic compounds present in the unripe fruit.

Do not “pick” passionfruit. When the fruit is ripe, it will fall from the vine. The skin may even wrinkle up, that’s ok, it means it nice and sweet!

Most passionfruit types are viny in growth, although some are shrubby. Some like to grow in the cool, foggy mountains of their native habitats, others in the humid lowlands, including Florida, and some even can take harder winters as far north as the Mid-Atlantic states.

There are tiny fruits such as the native *Passiflora suberosa*, a favorite of native butterflies, and there are enormous football size fruits, such as *P. quadranglaris*.

There are many varieties to choose from for growing in Florida, but not all passionfruit varieties will grow in Florida. The banana passionfruit is an example of this. Florida does not offer the right conditions.

Paul has also created a very handy chart discussing his years of research on *Passiflora* pollination that was handed out at the meeting.



Florida Fruit and Vegetable Festivals in 2025:

Where, When and More to Find a Florida Fruit and Vegetable Festival Near You!

https://www.pickyourown.org/FLfestivals.htm#google_vignette



Our Club's 2025 Horticulture Display at the Florida State Fair

Write-up and Photos By George Campani



Since 1995 the Club has produced a Horticulture Display at the Florida State Fair. This exhibit takes place in the Florida Center Building and is there during the entire Fair. This year was no different and Paul Branesky wanted this year's Display Theme to be on pollinators and he designed the presentation; which included a beehive in the center of the 8-foot by 10-foot exhibit.

Undaunted that we could not have live bees flying around in the building, Paul went searching on Amazon and ordered plastic bees. Really, hundreds of plastic bees to dress-up the beehive, and around the beehive were mango trees, a miracle fruit tree, a Seagrape Plant, and an Allspice Tree, with a pollinator or two on some of these plants.

For some Fairgoers that stopped to talk with our volunteers, this visual display was a great conversation piece highlighting the large contribution bees and other pollinators make in growing fruit. In addition, the pollinator theme was further backed up with bee literature handouts staged on one

of the brochure racks.

On the other brochure rack there were handouts on citrus that were donated by the Citrus Research and Education Center in Lake Alfred, for the purpose of informing the public. The handouts included: UF/IFAS Home Citrus Educational Series: How to Plant a Citrus Tree; UF/IFAS Extension, Citrus Disease Identification Chart; UF/IFAS Extension, Children's Citrus Activity Sheets; QR code, UF/IFAS Thank You For Your Interest In Growing Citrus.

Furthermore, in the exhibit we installed a Citrus Tree Defender that is used to cover citrus trees with white screening to help protect the tree (when it is small) from the Asian Citrus Psyllid that spreads Citrus Greening—a bacterial disease also known as (HLB). This prop is also a great conversation piece for volunteers to interact with the Fairgoers interested in citrus.

A special thanks to The Horticulture Display Committee's volunteers that were "beezy" before the fair opened getting plants, and putting the exhibit together; and during the Fair they answered questions, handed out literature, and resupplied the brochure rack.

Volunteers: Paul Branesky, Mehdi Rakhshani, Scott Petersen, Charles Novak, MaryAnne Branesky, Tom Schaefer, and George Campani

A special thanks to those Club Members who lent us their potted plants for the Club's Horticulture Display: Jene Van Butzel (Jene's Tropicals), and Scott Petersen.

A special thanks to Paul Branesky who lent us his beehive for the Club's Horticulture Display and Chaired the Horticulture Display Committee.



⌘ What's Happening ⌘

by Paul Zmoda

Passing our frost-free date (3/15) here without damage was very comforting. The frost covers got used briefly and only some bananas suffered. The mandatory pruning is finished; what's left can be done at my leisure.

As the winter vegetable season comes to a close, the warm weather crops are taking their place. Corn and beans are up and more seeds are in. The fall tomatoes are picked often and some new plants are growing fast. Purple sugar apple seedlings are coming up while older seedlings are getting larger pots.

While it is still cool out, I like to start a batch of wine. Two years' worth of grapes, previously frozen, were thawed, crushed, pressed, and set to fermenting in February. The 114 pounds of grapes look as if they will yield about thirty bottles of dry, red wine. I expect it will be ready by Christmas.

Some grape budwood I received at the last meeting has been grafted. I also grafted some persimmon buds that I had parked on another tree since last year. Loquats are ripe and jaboticabas are almost ripe.

New plantings: moringa and papayas.



Wine grapes in the crusher - photo Paul Zmoda



Local Events: The First Florida Vanilla Symposium

The Sunshine State Vanilla & The Tampa Greenhouses are hosting their first annual Florida Vanilla Symposium on April 12th from 10am to 4pm at the Greenhouses at Fallen Oak Farms in Valrico, FL.

Learn more about vanilla growing in Florida, and register for the symposium at the website:

<https://www.sunshinestatevanilla.com/>



Seed chairman here - Got some awesome Annona Parviflora seeds – Very limited quantity.

This Annona is great because:

It is hardy to mid 20's maybe lower, so can be grown by anyone in the Tampa area. It is a small shrubby tree, easy to grow in container or small yard. The yellow skinned fruits have a great tasting, custardy, sweet pulp like other sugar apples. They are rare!

Email if interested. Tampa.Bay.RFCI@gmail.com

Seeds will be at the April meeting for distribution, so you must be there to pick up. Seeds will not be held if you do not come to the meeting, as they must be planted.

My Spring Garden

Here is my little garden,
Some seeds I'm going to sow.
Here is my rake to rake the ground,
Here is my handy hoe.

Here is the big, round yellow sun;
The sun warms everything.
Here are the rain clouds in the sky;
The birds will start to sing.

Little plants will wake up soon,
And lift their sleepy heads;
Little plants will grow and grow
In their little, warm earth beds.

Unknown author



∞ Club Notes ∞

Club Board elections will happen at the April meeting this year. If you would like to volunteer your time and talents to the Club, and have the opportunity to learn how the Club works, be on committees, and offer your new ideas and thoughts for future events, we would love to hear from you. Come to the April meeting and hear more about volunteering for a Board position. There are also a number of other opportunities for members to help out, such as helping people at the sign-in desk at meetings, calling out raffle tickets, off-site meet & greet opportunities, and help with social media. Ask about these opportunities at the next meeting!

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: **April 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 \$25 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 \$25 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 make quick, 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