



January 2026

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

Meetings unless otherwise noted are held at 2:00pm:
The Oaks at St. Mark's Event Venue.
13312 Cain Road Tampa, FL 33625

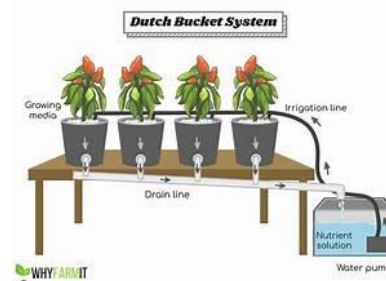
<http://www.rarefruit.org>

Tampa.Bay.RFCI@gmail.com

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

✧ Upcoming Programs and Events ✧

January 11th, Dutch Bucket Tomatoes - The Club's very own Michelle James will be discussing growing tomatoes hydroponically, Dutch Bucket Style. She has been a hobbyist grower of this style for about eight years now. She will show you how her tomato habit has progressed. Also, if she has enough tomatoes ready, she will bring some in to potentially sample. She grows primarily heirloom style tomatoes. The Dutch bucket style of hydroponics is a simple, and effective way of growing very productive tomatoes. Don't miss this!



Social hour - 1:00p-2:00p

Potluck - 2:00p - 2:30p

Introduction/Speaker - 2:30p-3:30p

Raffle/Closing: 3:30p-4:00p



February – No regular meeting! We'll be at the 2026 Florida State Fair for our Citrus Celebration. The Fair runs from February 5-16, in Tampa. More information on page 6 in this newsletter, and volunteer sign-up at the January meeting.

✧ Welcome New Members ✧

Sebastian Elaraj Tarpon Springs

**President: Chris Ramirez; Vice President: Paul Branesky, Secretary: Hillary Cosenza;
Treasurer: Susan McAveety; Newsletter/Membership: Denise Provencher**

Holiday Party 2025

Photos: George Campani



Fall 2025 Tour and Taste Opportunities for Florida Citrus

This fall, Florida Citrus breeding teams put together several touring and tasting opportunities for those involved with and interested in Florida Citrus. These events are interesting for participants, mostly those in the industry, but also students, educators, and others interested in citrus production.

In November, George Campani attended the presentation provided by Jose Chaparro and his team in Gainesville. Here is his synopsis of the event.

A trip to the UF IFAS Gainesville “Citrus Variety Display” on November 14, 2025 was a fun and educational experience for me. At the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, the scientists work to develop new citrus hybrid oranges, mandarins, grapefruit, etc. The reason for developing these new varieties varies. Sometimes they want to make an earlier fruit harvest, or to make a seedless cultivar. Another important reason is to make a citrus plant disease tolerant to a certain pathogen. After years developing a new cultivar, they need to see how it tastes, and that is why I like to travel and check it out.

Tasting new citrus fruit is a fun experience for me and some of the fruit varieties that I tasted were quite good I thought, and might make commercial production. Also, at the event there was juice to be sampled; thereupon, I further enjoyed the fantastic flavors of the mixed juices. In my opinion the 60%-40% orange-mandarin mixed juice was spectacular.

Note, some of the cut fruit only has a number, and has not been named, yet. (see pictures) So, if you would like to taste new varieties of citrus, with a keen sense not just new to you, but citrus cultivars not yet released to the public, then you might like going to a UF/IFAS “Citrus Variety Display.” There you will taste new citrus varieties, as you fill out a taste survey. This usually includes both cut-up fruit and juice.

Dr. Jose Chaparro and his team did a great presentation, which also included a trip out into the grove.



In December, Denise and Bryon Provencher attended a citrus tour and tasting event held in Groveland at the Whitmore Foundation Farm, hosted by the US Department of Agriculture and the Florida Citrus Research Foundation. The event began with a fun hayride for participants out into the groves. Here, we could see the many trial plots of various varieties of citrus, rootstock trials, demonstration plantings, and seed trials. New research is advancing here, and the many speakers talked about the different projects they were involved in, and answered many questions. We got to see the Donaldson tree, and sampled delicious Bingo mandarin fruit right in the field. Bingo is a delicious, easy peel, seedless, and very juicy variety, that would be excellent for backyard growing. Commercial growers find the fruit too small for mechanized equipment.

After the hayride, participants were provided a wonderful lunch, and then participated in a tasting of dozens of varieties of citrus, and avocados as well. The feedback from the survey that the participants filled out is very helpful for the researchers in knowing what tastes preferences are, and what people like.

The day was productive, educational, as well as fun.



The hayride through the groves.



Avocado trial field



CUPS trials



The Donaldson tree



Tasting and telling.



Bingo citrus trees

∞ What's Happening ∞

by Paul Zmoda

Happy New Year fellow fruiterers! Cool weather is here (some days), and that means you can tackle the essential tree pruning, and planting in relative comfort.

I've begun grape pruning while tackling each avocado tree now and then. Pruning avocados is removing dead branches, and branches that touch each other. Dense parts of the trees are thinned out and low branches are removed so mowing and walking under them are safer. Finally, I top all the tall leaders so that the trees remain at 12-15 feet.

Pollinated soursop fruits are starting to swell up and look well on the tree that was brought indoors last month.

Lots of seedlings are thriving in the laundry room window – Annonas, onions, and capers! Yes, the capers are sprouting finally, months after the detailed treatment was undertaken. I had lost my mature plant in the last hurricane, but fortunately it had produced fruit with seeds.

Black sapote should be ripe soon, and we got the last Coquette avocados. The vegetable gardens are looking really good now with mustard, peas, carrots, herbs, and turnips coming in as the beans and corn come to a close. Tomatoes are the current star now for me. German Pink is a huge fruit whose slices fit nicely in sandwiches.



German Pink tomato
Photo: Paul Zmoda



Remember, December/January is the perfect time to get your pineapples planted, according to our member expert, Ian Greig. These can be crowns obtained from the local supermarket or suckers from this year's harvest in August. Remember that Pineapples are an 18-month plant, so that plants planted this winter will be ready for harvest in July/August.

Looking for Volunteers for the Citrus Celebration 2026

The Citrus Celebration will take place once again this year at the Florida State Fair in the Special Events Center Building. The date is Sunday, February 15, 2026; with some Club volunteers arriving as early as 8:00 A.M.

This is a fun event where Club Volunteers gather to cut citrus fruit for tasting, display many citrus varieties for viewing, hand out literature for growing citrus, and answer questions on growing fruit in the Tampa Area.

There will be a “Volunteer Sign-Up Sheet” at the January Meeting on Sunday, January 11, 2026.

Hope to see you then! Written by George Campani, Committee Member



A visit to the Florida Citrus Arboretum can be a fun field event:

Before the Citrus Celebration each year, there is a fun trip by the Citrus Celebration Committee to the “Citrus Arboretum” in Winter Haven. This is where we collect many of the citrus varieties that will be displayed on tables during the Citrus Celebration. The Arboretum has many unusual varieties of citrus, and is our “go to place” where we pick and label many of the citrus varieties that will be on display.

Members are invited to join the Citrus Celebration Committee; if they wish, as the Committee’s volunteers collect fruit. So, if you want to experience picking in a citrus grove; come join us on Wednesday, February 11, 2026 at 10:00 A.M.

It is a great place for citrus lovers! George Campani, Committee Member

∞ Club Notes ∞

Blinds needed! If anyone has any of those inexpensive 1" window blinds, metal or plastic, that they are not using anymore or are going to throw away, the seed chairman could sure use them to replenish the stock for labels. If you have any of these old blinds, don't throw them out, please bring them to the seed table at the next meeting. Thank you! Seed Chairman



It's that time – to start planning for, and locating citrus fruits for the Citrus Celebration in February 2026. If you, or someone you know would have some fruit to share for this important event, the Club needs fruits! Any and all varieties of citrus are welcome.

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: **December 22nd.**

∞ Membership information ∞



Both new and renewing members can make quick, secure credit card payment using Square. Use this QR code

Check your newsletter email or address label for your membership renewal date.

Prefer using a check? Use address below.

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



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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