



RFCI

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

February 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

⌘ Upcoming Programs and Events ⌘



February – No regular meeting! Date: Sunday February 15 - at the Florida State Fair in the Special Events Center. Map on page 13

We'll be at the 2026 Florida State Fair for our Citrus Celebration. There are many opportunities for you to volunteer at this important event. The Citrus Celebration is an exciting way for the Club to share knowledge about fruit with the general public, and is one of our top educational events.

Note: Please wear your club t-shirts to be easily identifiable by the fair staff so they allow you to enter early. Bring your parking pass and fair tickets that were handed out at the January meeting. Enter from MLK and go to gate 3 which is closest to the special events center.

We need volunteers starting at 8am to start cutting fruit.

Please wash hands and wear the gloves we provide. Do not eat while cutting.

All volunteers will get to go through the line for a free tasting after we begin letting in customers at 10am.

We will need volunteers from 10-2 to help with education, selling juice, and any other things that may be needed. Lunch will be provided to volunteers around noon. Make sure to thank Maryann for the amazing meal.

We also need volunteers again at 2:00 pm to help begin clean up.

Please use the signup genius so we can plan accordingly:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/30E0B4FA4AE23ABFD0-61591311-citrus>

Any other questions can be answered in our members only Facebook page or replied to this email address.

March 8th – Regular meeting - Travis Morton – Jaboticaba!!!

⌘ Welcome New Members ⌘

Slava Wojcik New Port Richey

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

Dutch Bucket System of Growing Tomatoes

With speaker **Michelle James**



The Club's very own Michelle James spoke at January's meeting about a successful way to grow tomatoes in Florida using the Dutch Bucket Method. Michelle has been raising tomatoes this way for eight years, and enjoys heirloom varieties that reflect her Italian heritage. During the eight years of growing tomatoes with the Dutch Bucket Method, she has had the opportunity to fine tune her skills and work out any problems that can occur in Florida, including surviving a tornado! Michelle shared her many trials and successes using this unique way of growing tomatoes.

Michelle says this way of growing tomatoes is perfect for the busy or lazy gardener, and is an easy way to get lots of fruit with much less of the issues and problems that can occur with growing them in Florida.

There are zero pests or diseases or root nematodes!

The system is basically a form of hydroponics using PVC piping, pump with an auto shutoff and 15 minute timer, drip hose and nutrient solution.

The key is making sure the tank doesn't drain out or the pump will end up sucking in air.

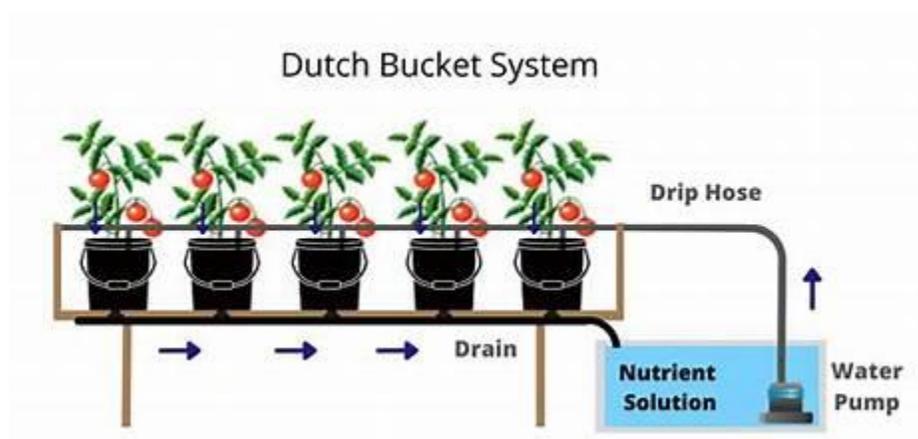
For preventative organic solutions to bug problems, BT (*Bacillus Thuringiensis*), and spinosad are her go-to choices.

Using hydroponic clay balls (Leca) works much better than other media such as perlite.

To prevent animals like raccoons from getting your loot, simply pick the fruits just as they begin to turn color and ripen them up inside. This works so much better than any other critter trap or solution on the market.

If cold weather is expected, the watering can be allowed to run all night to protect plants.

Sungold is one of her favorite heavy producers, and an excellent choice if you are just starting out with this system.





Under construction



A beautiful Bounty
Photos provided by Michelle James

☞ What's Happening ☜

by Paul Zmoda

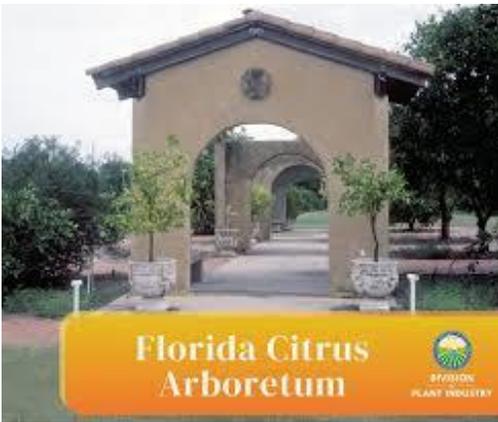
What a birthday present I received on January 16th – Frost!! It wasn't too bad, but 33 degrees F is as low as I saw at dawn, and I had covered a few things, and brought others inside. The bananas and coffee look bad, but that was to be expected.



Pruning is still underway; lots of select pieces are being saved for grafting or rooting later. Although there are some plantains available that are still ok despite brown leaves from the frost, the real fruiting stars right now are black sapotes. These tropical persimmons must be picked at maturity, and allowed to ripen fully indoors. Inside you will see why they are called the chocolate pudding fruit. They are a deep, creamy brown – dense and slightly sweet. The tree is somewhat cold tender and can be grafted like any other persimmons onto native, American persimmon rootstock.

Photo: Paul Zmoda

A benefit for those who volunteer:



Before the Citrus Celebration each year, there is a fun trip by the Citrus Celebration Committee to the Florida 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. Members are invited to join the Citrus Celebration Committee to collect fruit. Join us on Wednesday, February 11, 2026 at 10:00 A.M. **Meet at the Citrus Arboretum, 3027 Lake Alfred Rd, Winter Haven, FL 33881** It is a great place for citrus lovers!
George Campani, Committee Member



Map of the Florida State Fair access location – MLK Blvd is on the South end – gate 3 is shown in purple at the parking area. Special Events Center is marked in purple as well - #8.



It's not just for citrus growers; there is plenty of educational opportunities for small growers of fruits and vegetables too!

The Florida Citrus Show brings together growers, researchers, and industry partners for a high-energy day of education and networking in a relaxed, tailgate-style setting. Hosted at the UF/IFAS Indian River Research and Education Center and the USDA U.S. Horticultural Research Laboratory in Fort Pierce, the show features expert-led seminars and a central tailgate trade show with more than 50 leading agricultural companies.

Exhibitors will serve up their favorite tailgate dishes, giving attendees the chance to sample, connect, and vote for the coveted Tailgate Food Champion. Growers can cast their vote for a chance to win a \$500 cash prize while catching up with peers over a friendly game of cornhole. Educational citrus and vegetable sessions led by UF/IFAS and USDA experts round out the program and deliver timely insights growers can take back to the field.

Registration is complimentary for commercial growers, farm owners and managers, professional crop advisers, association executives and board members, and the government, legislative and agricultural research communities.

When:

March 12, 2026

Trade show: 8:00 a.m.–1:30 p.m.

Breakfast: 8:00–9:00 a.m.

General session: 8:45–10:00 a.m.

Break to visit trade show: 10:00–10:45 a.m.

Educational sessions: 10:45 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Tailgate party: 12:00–1:30 p.m.

Educational sessions: 1:30–3:00 p.m.

Where:

Fort Pierce, Florida at the UF/IFAS Indian River Research and Education Center (2199 South Rock Road) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, U.S. Horticultural Research Laboratory. (2001 South Rock Road)

∞ Club Notes ∞

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: **February 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.

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