RFCI

May 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 ∞

May 17th - Florida Mushroom King Log Workshop with Andrew Johnson, owner of a mushroom farm based in Deltona. The Florida "Shroom King" prides himself on growing mushrooms using organic practices! We primarily focus on Oysters and Lions mane, with some additional seasonal varieties!

Social hour - 1:00p-2:00p
Potluck - 2:00p - 2:30p
Introduction/Speaker - 2:30p-3:30p
Raffle/Closing: 3:30p-4:00p

Welcome New Members!

Andrew Jarrett

Wendy Hilton

Rebecca Storm

2026 Spring Plant Festival at USF Botanical Gardens

Write–up and Photos by George Campani

Our Club participated in the USF Spring Plant Festival the weekend of April 11 and 12, and the event was a big success. This year the weather turned out to be cool and sunny in the early morning making for an enjoyable time when setting-up for the day's event. Note: the Club's set-up location was moved once again this year.

The new location was a somewhat shady area that was about 100 ft. closer to the entrance gate. This spot was busy with foot traffic and we caught the attention of the many festivalgoers with our large plant selection and with the Club's volunteers ready to answer the many questions from the festivalgoers. There were conversations on how to plant, how long until it fruits, and does it need two plants to pollinate; and there were many discussions on cold hardiness and this year's cold damage in our area.

Consequently, the volunteers mentioned that many of our Club Members had a lot of cold damage on their mangos—mango plants turning brown from the cold and that will not fruit this season. Some tips by the volunteers: a Jaboticaba can be planted in a damp area of the yard and avocados need a dry area.

Tropical juices were part of the plant sale and our Club kept the tropical juice enthusiasts happy with a choice between guava juice, mango juice, passion juice, and guanabana juice. The most requested juice this weekend was the guanabana juice (or soursop juice) a favorite of many festivalgoers. Getting this drink ready is an endeavor that starts with a stop at Sanwa Farmer's Market. This is where we purchase the Guanabana frozen concentrate. When thawed this concentrate (84 oz container) is mixed with 252 oz of water and the result is a delicious tasting juice.

There were many interesting varieties of plants at this Plant Sale brought in by our Club Members:
Paul Zmoda brought in bunch grapes (Blanc Du Bois), Capparis Spinosa, Caper plants, Annona Cherimola, Cherimoya plants, Asimina Triloba (Paw Paw) plants, a Loquat Seedling, a Longhorn Okra plant, and the Annona Glabra (Pond Apple) plants. There were many conversations on how to grow his many plants and those interested in the Pond Apple, Paul mentioned it is Florida's only native Annona and explained to many where it is growing in the USF Botanical Gardens.

Kenny Gil had brought in the Grape varieties (Blanc Du Bois and Il Primo), Grumichama plants, and Sugar Apple (Annona) plants, and Mamey plant, and others. Kenny had many conversations on his experience on growing plants to share with the many interested festivalgoers that stopped by.

Rochan Premraj brought in a Butterscotch Sapodilla plant, Canistel Plant, Yellow Catley plant, Cherry of the Rio Grande plant, and Banana varieties that included Ice Cream and Rajapuri. Rochan was there for many discussions which included a conversation on the Rajapuri banana, a small banana plant usually under 10ft and considered cold-hardy for bananas, although like other bananas, it does not do well when near freezing.

A special thanks to our hard-working Club President, Chris Ramirez, for coordinating and running this event. Chris also ordered a large supply of plants for the sale including: avocados, mangos, jaboticabas, Governor's plums, and many others.

A big thanks to all the hard-working Club Members that made this event a big success: Scott Peterson, Paul Zmoda, Roshan Premraj, Avi Stern, Kenny Gil, Yoshimi Tamura, Regina Carnell, Hillary Cosenza, Mehdi Rakhshani, George Campani, Charlie Crowley, Julene Clarke, Susan McAveety, Bindi Shikala, and Shigeharu Sawada.
I apologize to those I have missed.

∞ What's Happening ∞

by Paul Zmoda

Spring is here, but it feels like summer already. With the heat comes attention to timely watering. Plants in containers are especially prone to drying out quickly. I depend on our well so much.

Still removing and cleaning up dead and frozen plants. This process could very well go on for months. Mayhaws seem to be the only fruit ripening now. Very tasty and great for making a superior jelly.

All persimmons to be grafted are done. I got lots of new ones in the pipeline; the native American cultivar called 'Prok' is especially vigorous and promising. Many grapes are looking good and setting bunches of fruit.

New planting: avocado, persimmon, okra, hot peppers, callaloo, and long beans.

Mayhaw fruit Photo: Paul Zmoda

How Florida's changing weather impacts tropical, subtropical fruit crops in your landscape

A newly released UF/IFAS publication offers science-based insights to help all Floridians, whether you are a backyard grower or commercial producer, understand the environmental factors that shape the success of your fruit trees and crops. The Ask IFAS Extension publication, Quick Guide to Environmental Factors Impacting Subtropical and Tropical Fruit Crops in Florida, compiles science-based insights to guide decisions for both commercial and residential landscapes.

Authors explain how Florida is experiencing an expanded interest in tropical fruit production beyond its traditional centers in extreme South Florida. Warmer trends, uncommon freeze events and shifts in land use have prompted both long-established producers and newer growers to explore alternative fruit crops statewide. Researchers also stress that while opportunities are increasing, successful production hinges on realizing how environmental conditions vary across regions and how individual crops respond to those conditions.

"Florida's fruit-growing success is closely tied to water conditions, not just temperature," said Young Gu Her, associate professor, hydrology and agricultural engineering at the UF/IFAS Tropical Research and Education Center. "Across the state, soils range from sandy, fast-draining sites to low-lying areas with poor drainage and shallow water tables." Young Gu Her, associate professor, hydrology and agricultural engineering at the UF/IFAS Tropical Research and Education Center.After heavy rain, water can pool around roots, reduce oxygen in the soil and weaken trees or increase disease risk, while dry periods can quickly stress trees on sandy soil unless irrigation is well managed.

In coastal areas or places that stay wet because the groundwater is near the surface, irrigation water can also become salty, which adds a layer of stress that impacts root health, nutrient uptake and long-term productivity.
"Understanding how water moves through a yard or a grove, and how long soil stays wet or dry, is often the difference between a tree that thrives and one that struggles," said Her. "Hydrology and soil conditions are a major part of why the same fruit tree can perform very differently across Florida and is why matching the crop to the site and managing drainage and irrigation with local water risks in mind are essential for reliable fruit production."

The guide also emphasizes how environmental tolerance differs widely across fruit crops. Each crop has its own optimal and limiting temperature ranges, and understanding those thresholds is essential not only for large-scale growers but also for homeowners who plant fruit trees in backyards, community gardens or small urban orchards.
Authors explain that many tropical and subtropical fruit trees require a form of environmentally induced dormancy, known as quiescence, to trigger flowering and ensure productive fruit to set. Recognizing this cycle can help urban residents avoid misreading natural seasonal changes, such as leaf drop or dormant growth, as signs of plant stress or decline.

"Florida fruit growing is changing as the weather becomes less predictable," said Haimanote Bayabil, associate professor of water resources in the Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering. "The increased frequency of flooding, drought, heat and salinity in some areas means growers need to carefully select sites and crops, manage water more efficiently and establish effective drainage and irrigation systems." Selecting sites less prone to flooding and wet soil conditions is critical and can save growers money. However, crop selection is also important, as different crops have varying tolerance levels to different issues.

"Efficient water management, drainage and crop selection matter more than ever, especially as flooding, drought and salinity risks increase," said Bayabil. "In simple terms, success will depend on planting plants in the right place and plants that can better handle local conditions."

In many Florida neighborhoods, conditions such as poor drainage, low-lying yards and exposure to intense sun or prolonged heat can create microenvironments that influence fruit tree performance just as strongly as conditions on a farm.

The guide notes that tolerance to flooded or waterlogged soils varies widely among fruit species, and that salinity, whether from irrigation sources or coastal influences, can play a significant role in long-term plant health and productivity. This is a challenge relevant to urban and suburban residents, who often plant fruit trees near homes, driveways or stormwater features without realizing how water movement and soil characteristics affect root systems.
"Because Florida's weather is becoming more variable, growers and homeowners should expect shifts in flowering timing, fruit development and irrigation demand from year to year," said Her. "Paying attention to site drainage, soil moisture conditions and water quality, especially after heavy rain or during dry spells, can help people adjust practices early and reduce stress before it affects yield and fruit quality."

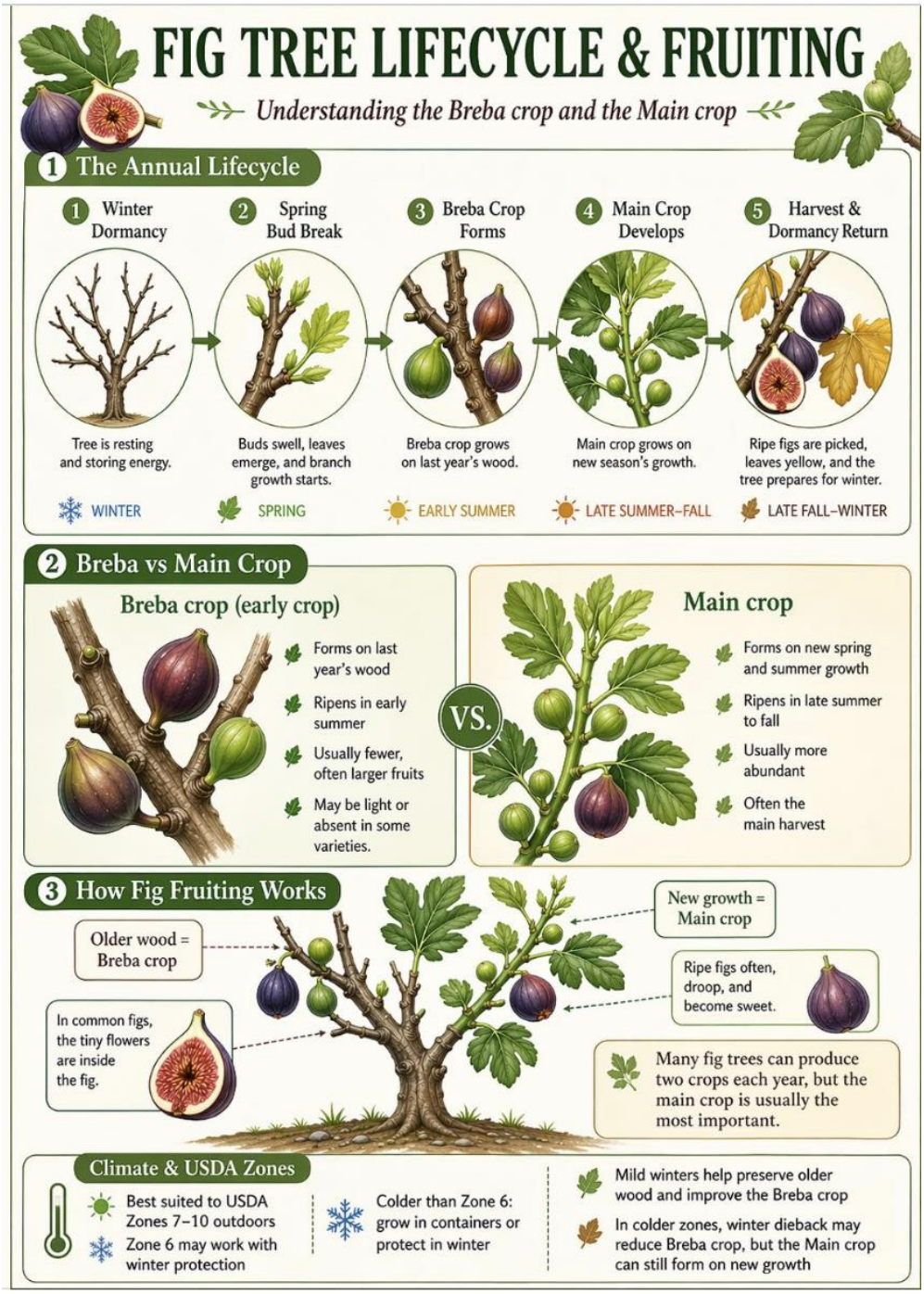
FIG TREE LIFECYCLE & FRUITING
Understanding the Breba crop and the Main crop
1 The Annual Lifecycle
1 Winter Dormancy
2 Spring Bud Break
3 Breba Crop Forms
4 Main Crop Develops
5 Harvest & Dormancy Return
Tree is resting and storing energy.
Buds swell, leaves emerge, and branch growth starts.
Breba crop grows on last year's wood.
Main crop grows on new season's growth.
Ripe figs are picked, leaves yellow, and the tree prepares for winter.
WINTER
SPRING
EARLY SUMMER
LATE SUMMER–FALL
LATE FALL–WINTER
2 Breba vs Main Crop
Breba crop (early crop)
Forms on last year's wood
Ripens in early summer
Usually fewer, often larger fruits
May be light or absent in some varieties.
VS.
Main crop
Forms on new spring and summer growth
Ripens in late summer to fall
Usually more abundant
Often the main harvest
3 How Fig Fruiting Works
Older wood = Breba crop
New growth = Main crop
Ripe figs often, droop, and become sweet.
In common figs, the tiny flowers are inside the fig.
Many fig trees can produce two crops each year, but the main crop is usually the most important.
Climate & USDA Zones
Best suited to USDA Zones 7–10 outdoors
Zone 6 may work with winter protection
Colder than Zone 6: grow in containers or protect in winter
Mild winters help preserve older wood and improve the Breba crop
In colder zones, winter dieback may reduce Breba crop, but the Main crop can still form on new growth

ꕥ Club Notes ꕥ

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: **May 22nd**.

ꕥ Membership information ꕥ

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 of 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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