

Gulf Coast Fruit Study Newsletter

Volume 15, Issue 3

Edited By: Ethan A. Natelson, M.D.

August 16, 2001 Meeting

Planning Committee:

Bill Adams
Leon Atlas, M.D.
Yvonne Gibbs
Prema Kuratti
George McAfee
Bob Marx
Ethan A. Natelson, M.D.
David Parish
Bob Randall, Ph.D.

Upcoming Meetings of Interest

The annual NAFEX Meeting will be held September 12-15, 2001 in Portland, OR. See the NAFEX website (<http://www.nafex.org>) for details and registration.

Current Meeting:

Want to try some varieties before you buy? Then plan to attend the Harris County Fruit Tasting on **August 16**. We will sample fruit (muscadines, pears, jujubes, pears & pomegranates) by about **6:30 pm** and Dr. Ethan Natelson will give us a report on the SFF meeting. Call 281/855-5600 if you need more info — oh, and bring a pocket knife. We try to slice a lot of the fruit you may want to cut your own fresh.

Contact Us!

Harris Cty Extension Service
2 Abercrombie Road
Houston, TX 77080
Phone: 281/855-5611
Fax: 281/855-5638

Annual Pear Tasting

We continue to search for pear cultivars that will provide backyard gardeners with a disease free tree that provides shade as well as quality fruit. Many of our trees under trial are chance seedlings found throughout the warmer area of the South, as well as a few from breeding programs around the country. Occasionally, these trees will bear fruit within 3-4 years, particularly if planted on Quince rootstock and occasionally on Pyrus rootstock. Others may not fruit for 7-8 years. Frequently, the fruit improves in quality, as the tree ages. Thus, fully evaluating these cultivars is a long-term project we hope you will help us participate in.

Among the pears you will taste this year are **Henderson**, a large Asian pear from Hattiesburg, MS, and which is probably a bud mutation of **Housi** (we will have this one, too, for comparison). It is lower chill than **Housi**, more blight resis-

tant, and may be the best Asian for our area, so far. We will also have another look at **Southern Bartlett**, found in Abbeville, LA. This tree is a very heavy bearer, and the fruit can be very large (if the birds leave it alone). Once of full size, the tree is also blight resistant. Another new one is the **Acres Home** pear, found by George McAfee. It is also a very heavy bearer, fruiting in about 3 years on Pyrus rootstock and is blight resistant. The pears are very nice looking and large. But how do they taste? Come and see. We will also have some **Broussard** pears from Delacambre, LA. A firm Asian, this one is another possibility for our area. We also will have others we have tried before, including **Warren**, **Leona**, **Lowry**, **Tennessee**, **President**, **Baldwin**, **Meadows**, **Pope** and others. Many addi-

tional cultivars, including a large group from Mississippi, are under trial and will be available next year.

Unlike apples, most pears need a treatment period to develop their best flavor after harvest. This conditioning varies, and thus we may not have each particular type at its peak. Generally, ripeness is determined by coloration change in the skin, breakage of the stem when the pear is slowly lifted, softness of the neck of the pear, and darkening of the seeds from a creamy brown to a dark brown or black color. At harvest, the pears should be placed in the refrigerator at 34 degrees for at least 10 days, and then brought out at room temperature in a paper bag or cardboard box for at least 4-5 days. Of course, they can be stored in the refrigerator for much longer periods.

Southern Fruit Fellowship Meeting

On June 21, more than 50 members of the Southern Fruit Fellowship met in Tallahassee, Florida, for our annual meeting. Jerald Krewer, who is the Director of the Peach Breeding Program at Florida State University, and Ron Lambert, a long-time member and who has a large, family owned plant nursery in Florida, had planned the meeting.

We visited the FSU winery and grape breeding program, which is in Tallahassee. We also sampled some of their white and red Muscadine grape wine which was definitely not ready for prime time. They are working on eliminating Pierce's disease in vinifera grapes (a problem here in Texas, too) by breeding. Muscadines are generally resistant to Pierce's disease but have a different chromosome number than vinifera and there is difficulty in cross-breeding viable grapes. They are also developing projects in genetic engineering, and they have a very modern facility and a large full time staff and budget.

Jerald showed us their peach breeding section, and we sampled hundreds of seedling peaches for quality. They seek size, color, taste, small pit and firm, rather than melting flesh for shipping purposes. We tasted a number of excellent melting flesh types which are great off the tree, but they all went to the incinerator. We also

tasted the Florida Blaze plum from Wayne Sherman's breeding program, which was excellent. It is a very low chill, large purple fruit and will do well here in Houston. I had planted my tree last year.

The highlight of the program was an extensive presentation on mangos, lychee nuts, jack fruit, cherimoyas, soursops and many other tropical fruits by the Morris family of Pine Island, Florida. They have an extensive planting on this island, which is off the western coast near Bokeela, and supply specialty stores and cruise boats with their unusual and beautiful fruit. Mrs. Morris has made numerous trips to Southeast Asia to collect plant material. They have numerous cultivars of every imaginable tropical fruit and brought large numbers of samples to share with us. Some of this was like casting pearls before swine, however, since eating this material seemed to require practice. Most thought the Durian tasted just like it smelled — really bad. The jackfruit was thought to resemble a mixture of celery and raw onions. Some of the mangos were just outstanding and I brought back seed from these.

Dr. Krewer gave us a pictorial tour of Chile which has a very diverse climate, unlimited water

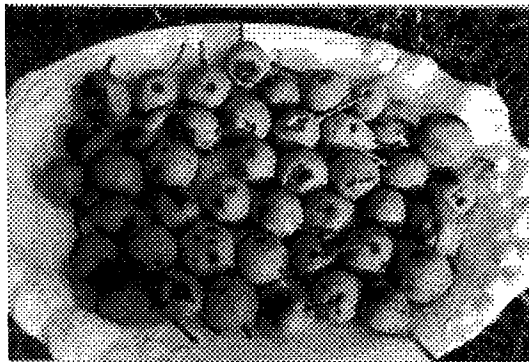
supply, and very few native fruits. The varied climates down the long expanse of the county can supply blueberries, grapes, pears and many other crops for export. Dr. Krewer indicates the standard of living is relatively high, crime very low, and transportation by buses is excellent. Their seasons are opposite from ours, and so they can ship without fear of competition for the fresh market in other countries.

We also visited Just Fruits plant nursery, a successful and very well designed local and mail-order business. Running a plant nursery is hard work and a difficult business today. Even the famous and perhaps the oldest family owned nursery in the United States, Stark Brothers, were acquired by a larger group in 1999 and are now in bankruptcy and closed.

Our next year's meeting will be in Ruston, Louisiana, which is near the Calhoun experimental station of LSU for brambles. We hope some of you can come. The SFF is now available as a chat line on the Internet. Just e-mail NAFEX_SFF@yahoo.com and you are on the list. Dues are now \$10.00/year which also gives you our newsletter. Write or e-mail Retta Davis (DAVISD_@hotmail.com), 2051 Evergreen Drive, Shreveport, LA 71118 for information.

Hailstorm Hits Houston

On Monday April 16, and after the largest pear set I have ever had, we had a massive hail storm come through Southwest Houston. In some areas the hail stones were as big as softballs. In our neighborhood some trees were stripped of leaves. The pear trees sustained two types of damage. First to the individual fruit which had gashes that healed with damage, but did not cause fruit drop. This picture (below) shows some fruit that I cut from the trees weeks later. About 70% of the crop



was destroyed.

The hail also caused linear slices in the bark of 0.5 to 1 inch in length. This greatly exposes the trees to fireblight so I sprayed several times over the next few weeks with a mixture of streptomycin and foliar feeding to speed healing. This picture (at right) shows the healing wounds about a month after the event. I did get some blight as a result, but it was minimal.



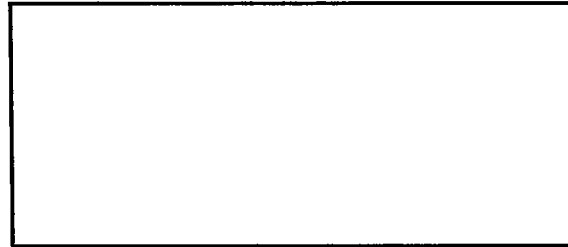
Pear Walnut Coffee Cake:

Ingredients:	1/4 cup butter	1/2 tsp. baking powder
	1/2 cup sugar	1/2 tsp. baking soda
	1 tsp. vanilla	1/4 tsp. salt
	1 egg	1/2 cup sour cream
	1 cup flour	1 1/2 cup pears, peeled, cored, diced
Topping ingredients:	1/2 cup brown sugar	2 T butter
	3/4 tsp. cinnamon	1/2 cup chopped walnuts

Mix butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Stir in vanilla and egg. Mix until smooth. In another bowl, mix flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Add to butter mixture. Add sour cream. Mix to blend ingredients. Fold in pears. Spread in an 8" greased square pan. For the topping, mix brown sugar, cinnamon and butter until well combined. Stir in the walnuts. Sprinkle the topping evenly over the cake. Bake at 350 F for 40-45 minutes or until top is well-browned. Yield: 8 servings.

**HARRIS COUNTY
MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION
2 ABERCROMBIE DRIVE
HOUSTON, TX 77084**

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Houston, TX
Permit No. 9216



**Texas Agricultural
Extension Service**
The Texas A&M University System