

# Gulf Coast Fruit Study Newsletter

Volume 18, Issue 3

Edited By: Ethan Natelson

August 24, 2004 Meeting

## *Planning Committee:*

Yvonne Gibbs  
George McAfee  
Doug McLeod  
Rick Matt  
Michael Morrison  
Ethan Natelson  
David Parish  
Bob Randall

## *Current Meeting:*

Our program will begin at **7:00 p.m. on August 24, 2004** at the Extension offices at the Bear Creek Facility. We will have a review and slide show of the annual North American Fruit Explorers (NAFEX) meeting. We will also have jujube and pear tasting.

## *Contact Us!*

*Harris Cty Extension Service*  
3033 Bear Creek Dr.  
Houston, TX 77084-4233  
Phone: 281/855-5611  
Fax: 281/855-5638

## **Plumcots**

A fruit that we have yet to successfully grow in the Houston area is the cross between a plum and an apricot, usually termed a **plumcot** or an **aprium**. The ability to make this cross was first described by Walter Burbank in 1901, and for many years this claim was widely disputed. Subsequent studies have shown that some of his reported crosses were, indeed, simply plums but others actually were the hybrid. Over the years, many others have achieved occasional success with such crosses and early varieties included the **Mesch-Mesch Amrah** and the **Yuska** which were available in the 1930s. Floyd Zaiger has been the most successful breeder of plumcots in the modern era, one of his first efforts being the **Plum Parfait**, which Dr. Leon Atlas and I grew

here about 15 years ago. The Zaiger technique has been to grow individual large parent plants of various stone fruits for a single, specific characteristic such as a particular color, size, softness, sweetness, etc., and then to maintain these plants in large pots in a closed greenhouse, so that interfering insect pollination could be prevented. His workers could then hand pollinate desired crosses, which were then grown from seed extracted from the fruit and immediately planted in lots of several thousand, only 6 inches or so apart. He indicated only about 3 of 1,000 plants would be culled out for further study and the rest bulldozed. Not a very efficient process.

The problem with plumcots has been that they are shy bearers. This situation is not totally a lack of pollination, since, even after hand pollination, there is excessive fruit drop. The Plum Parfait, for example, bloomed heavily but rarely set fruit. For those of us in Houston, a second difficulty has been with chill requirements, which, for many of these plants, are in the 600-800 chill hour range, and much higher than what we may achieve. Dr. David Ulmer, who has long been interested in plums, has several modern pluots in Sabastopol, California, a moderate climate with a wet winter, and rates his last 6 years with mature plants growing in the midst of abundant potential pollinators as follows:

(continued)

## Plumcots (continued)

**Flavor Supreme:** Wonderful flavor, but has had one reasonable crop in 6 years.

**Flavor Queen:** Good flavor, ripens with **Mariposa** plum, and is a reliable producer.

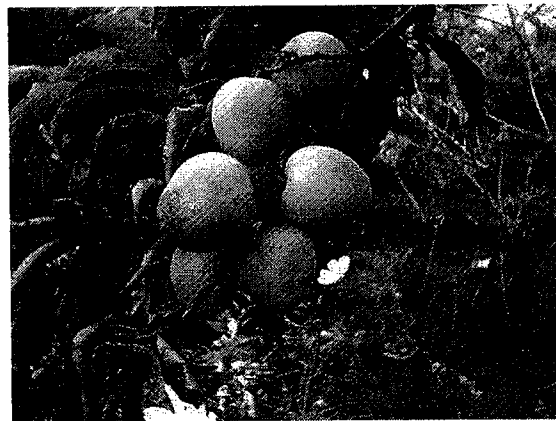
**Flavor King:** Excellent flavor and early bloom, but not a vigorous tree.

**Dapple Dandy:** Wonderful flavor (sold as **Dinosaur Egg**), flowers early, sets poorly.

I have a new one planted last year which is called **Flavorella**. It is a vigorous grower on plum rootstock and appears very healthy. Its chill requirement is among the lowest available and claimed to be only 300 hours. Perhaps we finally will have a plumcot for Houston.



Flavor Supreme (blue)



Flavor King (yellow-purple tip)

## Cinnamon Plum Tart

(untried recipe)

### Ingredients:

8 plums; pitted and quartered  
 1 pie shell; 9" baked  
 1 cup whipping cream  
 2 eggs  
 1 egg yolk  
 1 lemon (juice of)  
 1/2 cup sugar, granulated

### Topping:

3 T. brown sugar  
 1 tsp. cinnamon

(if you use small purple plums, increase the number to 12)

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Arrange the plums in the pie shell, skin side up. In a bowl, beat together, cream, eggs and egg yolk, lemon juice, granulated sugar and 1 tsp. cinnamon. Pour over the plums. Bake for 25 minutes or until the plums are softened. Mix together the brown sugar and the remaining 1 tsp. cinnamon. Sprinkle over the tart. Return to the oven and bake for a further 10 minutes or until crusty. Serve warm. Serves: 6.

Source: [www.recipe-land.com](http://www.recipe-land.com)

## Unusual New Berry

An unusual berry called **Haskap** is under study in western Oregon, to see if it can be adapted to warmer climates. Actually this species, *Lonicera caerulea*, is a form of edible honeysuckle, and the fruit looks like an oddly shaped blueberry. The name, **Haskap**, comes from the Ainu, an ancient, isolated Caucasian race living on the island of Hokkaido, in Japan, where the fruit has been successfully grown. The name is translated as "many fruit on branches". If studies are successful here, I think the first thing that needs to be done is to select a new name, as was highly successful for the Australian kiwiberry.

The plant is extremely cold hardy, growing even in Siberia, but has a wide range. Like jubes, the fruit can vary greatly in shape and size, but generally has an intense blue color and is rich in anti-oxidants, a modern buzz word for desirability. Most cultivars are tart, but some are sweet and can be eaten out of hand or used as pie material. Professor Maxine Thompson, age 77, and now retired from Oregon State University, has been studying the plant for more than 10 years and has collected a number of varieties from both Russia and Japan. The fruit ripens in May from two year old plants which have a varied growth habit. Depending upon pollination, the **Haskap** fruit may be seedless or with very tiny seeds. The plants root easily from cuttings.

Some of the North American Fruit Explorers (NAFEX) members, who have examined the experimental plantings of **Haskap**, feel that this plant has great potential for an edible shrub or ornamental in the home landscape. The berries are hidden in clusters, below the leaves, which lessens their appeal to birds. Dr. Thompson hopes to soon release the better cultivars, on an unrestricted basis, so we may have the opportunity to try these in Houston.

## New Plum Variety Released

Dr. W.R. Okie and his associates have released a high-quality plum called **Ruby Queen** from the Southeastern Fruit and Tree Nut Research Laboratory in Byron, Georgia. This cultivar is about 2 inches in diameter with a reddish black skin and red interior. It ripens slightly later than **Santa Rosa** at Byron. Unlike **Santa Rosa**, **Ruby Queen** is resistant to bacterial canker and bacterial spot. This would be a selection we should try in Houston, and particularly in the northern part of the area.

HARRIS COUNTY  
MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION  
3033 BEAR CREEK DR.  
HOUSTON, TX 77084-4233

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

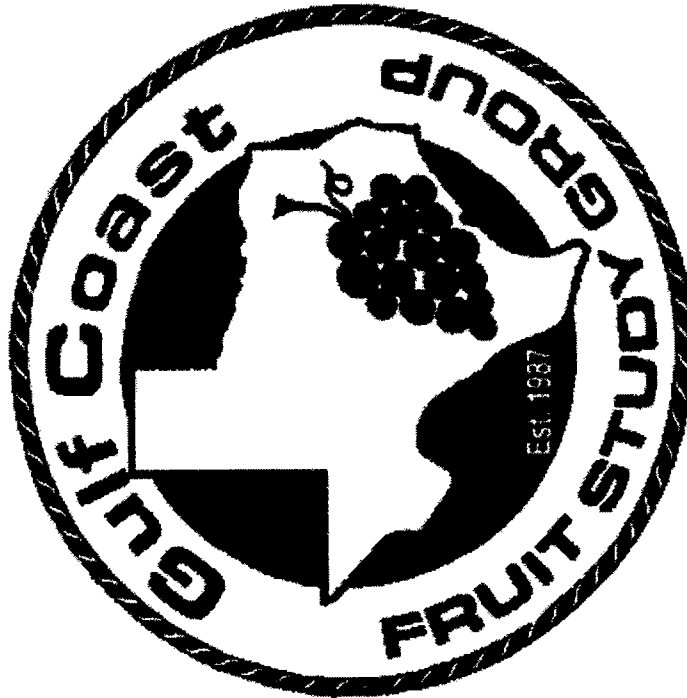
NON-PROFIT ORG.

U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

HOUSTON, TEXAS

PERMIT NO. 9216



## Texas Cooperative Extension The Texas A&M University System

Educational programs of the Texas Cooperative Extension are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age or national origin.