

Gulf Coast Fruit Study Newsletter

Volume 22, Issue 3

Edited By: Ethan Natelson

August 12, 2008 Meeting

Planning Committee:

Carol Brouwer

Anthony Camerino

Carolyn Cannon

Gregory Carrier

Yvonne Gibbs

George McAfee

Doug McLeod

Rick Matt

Ethan Natelson

David Parish

Victor Patterson

Bob Randall

Southern Fruit Fellowship (SFF) Annual Meeting – 2008 -Clanton, Alabama-

I just returned from our recent annual SFF meeting which was held this year in Clanton, Alabama. Our hosts were John Neighbors, a long-time member, with a world-class Alabama accent, and Robert Boozer, representing the Experimental Agricultural Station located there. These meetings consist of lectures and tours, and free plant exchanges (I brought back an unusual fig in my suitcase). There were about 55 people in attendance. One of the most interesting sites we visited was “Petals from the Past”, a very unique plant nursery run by Dr. Arlie Powell, whom many of you may know personally, or have knowledge of through his long and productive teaching career. Arlie began at Texas A & M University and then moved to the University of Florida and finally to Auburn University, for about 20 years before retiring. Our group visited him there, several years ago, when he was experimenting with Asian pears suited to that area. He is an expert on just about any fruit crop you can think of and always has a unique way of growing them and infectious enthusiasm. At our upcoming meeting I will show some photographs of his operation which is designed to display mature, bearing examples of all of the plants he sells, allow pick-your-own berries, figs, apples, hardy citrus and other fruits, hear regularly scheduled free lectures in a nice air-conditioned facility, test and display new varieties for the area, and see a remarkable collection of antique roses (one from the Houston area) and other landscape plants – all in an immaculate setting. His plants and comments have frequently been featured in the magazine, Southern Living.

We then visited a massive peach orchard featuring 38 different varieties selected to maximize the harvest season. Propane powered wind machines help to control the effects of sudden frosts in this particular altitude. One machine was fired up for us and it really creates a breeze that can drive out the cold air that settles among the trees and can destroy the total harvest. Pre-wind machine technology, helicopters were utilized at \$800/hour to fly low, back and forth over these orchards to accomplish the same thing. When the pilot got tired, he landed in the front yard and spent a few hours rest on the sofa in the owner’s house, before resuming his flights. In order to profitably manage a large peach orchard, every detail of growth, including rootstock selection and thinning, pest and disease management, harvest, frost protection, variety season, and packaging and marketing must be carefully attended to.

(continued)

Next Gulf Coast Fruit Study Meeting

Our next meeting will be on **August 12, 2008 at 7:00 P.M.** Fritz Westover will reprise his outstanding grape presentation that some were unable to attend due to a traffic pileup preventing access to the Extension Center. We will also have our annual pear tasting at this meeting, and several hard to find fruiting plants for door prizes. Please bring any locally grown fruit that we may sample.

Contact Us!

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

Southern Fruit Fellowship (SFF) Annual Meeting – 2008 (continued) **-Clanton, Alabama-**

We also spent time at John Neighbors' farm which features many citrus varieties including lemons, limes, and satsumas on dwarfing rootstock and kept to a height of about 10-12 feet and grown in-ground, in wind tunnels of cheap but unique construction. He is the only one in the Clanton area, which may get very cold, who is entirely successful. His citrus are so good, he claims one woman always gets a double order of his Meyer lemons, so her dog can eat one box – obviously they have unusual dogs in Alabama.

From the University side we visited their extensive plantings and saw some unique Kiwi berries, which are yellow, with unusual flavor, and under trial prior to release. They also had a number of Asian persimmons and other fruits. They also utilize larger wind tunnel technology for both citrus and berry plants, to optimize production.

We hope to have our next meeting here in Texas, probably not in metropolitan Houston, but within driving distance. We would like to feature grapes and other fruits that can be grown in Texas. We will be enlisting the help of some of our local experts for planning our location, tours and lectures. We hope some of you would like to attend, and we will let you know the location once it is decided upon. In Clanton, \$25.00 got you the full meeting registration and a catfish dinner-you can't beat that!

BILL ROHDE

Some of you may have noticed the passing of Bill Rohde, who was one of the early members of our Gulf Coast Fruit Study Group and who often donated plants for distribution as door prizes at our meetings and initiated our fruit tree sales and others in the community. Bill was very energetic and with Heidi Sheesley, developed Treesearch Farms, with much the same premise as did Arlie Powell begin his nursery. His unique warmed and gently moving propagating benches and plant houses and irrigation systems were very innovative for our area. He was greatly influenced by the late Dr. Leon Atlas. Many years ago, Dr. Atlas, Bill, George McAfee, Louis Walden, Alfred Loeblich, Bob Randall and I drove to Rio Farms, a then dedicated and unique citrus center with many mature and heavily bearing experimental citrus trees, located in South Texas. We sampled the fruit and harvested cuttings of many promising cultivars, some of which Bill and Heidi propagated at their nursery and introduced into our area. We will miss him.

GULF COAST FRUIT STUDY TOUR – OCTOBER 25, 2008

Our next Gulf Coast Fruit Study tour is to David Shackelford's Brazos Nursery, in West Columbia, Texas. This location is closer than our last outing, and some have had difficulty in making the 7:00 AM deadline. **Thus, we will leave from the Extension Offices at 8:00 AM, on October 25, 2008.** You will see that David has the production of citrus trees down to a science and can rapidly develop a vast number of plants. He has a number of unusual varieties and has been supplying many of the local nursery outlets and a number of distant customers seeking exotic citrus plants. For those who did not attend our last excursion to the B&O Orchards, you missed picking some outstanding Texas peaches. I believe the varieties we sampled included Hawthorne and Tex Royal, and many took a box home.

Seating on the bus is limited so, for those of you who are interested, please fill out and return the sign-up form. **Please note lunch will not be provided – please bring your own sack lunch. However, drinks will be provided. Remember, it is first come, first served, so please date your forms. If you are a couple, we must have both names – this is a requirement for the bus services.**

SIGN-UP FORM

Gulf Coast Fruit Study Tour – October 25, 2008
Brazos Nursery, West Columbia, Texas

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

NAME AND PHONE NUMBER OF EMERGENCY CONTACT PERSON (REQUIRED):

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Send to: Harris Cty Extension Service
3033 Bear Creek Dr.
Houston, TX 77084-4233
Phone: 281/855-5611
Fax: 281/855-5638
Attn: Yvonne Gibbs

DATE: _____

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

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

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