Gulf Coast Fruit Study Newsletter

Volume 23, Issue 2 **Edited By: Ethan Natelson** **August 11, 2009 Meeting**

Next Gulf Coast Fruit Study Meeting

Our upcoming meeting is at **7:00 PM** on **Tuesday, August 11** and will feature our annual pear and jujube tasting (and anything else anyone would like to bring) and a program on figs and perhaps peaches.

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Observations on Pears Grafted on Quince

We have accumulated a good deal of experience with very low-chill pears grafted onto *P. calleryana* and to several numbered **Old Home x Farmingdale (OH x F)** fire blight-resistant crosses in the interstem position on *P. calleryana* to modify tree size and shape. However, little has been done in our zone to observe the behavior of pears on quince, a favored dwarfing rootstock in parts of Oregon, and well-known to regularly induce precosity and occasionally to increase pear size.

From time to time I have heard whispered tales that the fabled **Warren** pear does well on quince with large cropping. In Houston, set of more than a handful of **Warren** pears on a *P. calleryana* rootstock would be front page news. In my experience, further study of these rumors usually reveals **Ayres** as the true grafted cultivar, not **Warren**.

I have studied a few low-chill cultivars on two different types of quince, **BA29-C**, the favorite Harry and David **Comice** pear rootstock, and a *Chanomeles* type quince given to me many years ago by the late Dr Leon Atlas. Both root-systems may be free-standing, but the *Chanomeles* is more vigorous with a better root anchor in our soils. My first observation was that quince wood is much denser than pear wood with a thinner cambium layer and not as easy to work with, even utilizing George McAfee's skills and grafting tools. Blight may also travel down the shaft of a blight-sensitive grafted scion and directly into the quince rootstock much more easily than with *P. calleryana* or the **OH x F** crosses as the rootstock.

It is also well-known that certain pears are directly compatible with quince while many cultivars, such as **Bartlett**, are not, and require a dually-compatible pear interstem. Traditionally, **Conference** and **Old Home**, among a few others, have been used for this purpose. I found that some pears that were directly compatible with my *Chanomeles*, were not with the **BA29-C**, and vice-versa, so this takes some trial and error to learn the most useful combinations. Since I was not certain about the compatibility of **Warren**, I used a **Conference** interstem on **BA29-C** and have a small, but healthy-appearing free-standing tree that added substantial growth this season. I hope at last to confirm or deny how **Warren** performs on quince and whether it will give us more of those wonderful pears in Zone 9.

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Observations on Pears Grafted to Quince (continued)

To illustrate how intricate and complex these compatibility issues may be, we studied the **Tennosui** pear which produces an outstanding quality large fruit that appears to have about a 550 chill hour requirement. It is modest in size on its own roots but very vigorous and upright on *P. calleryana* and *P. betulaefolia*. **Tennosui** proved to be incompatible with **OH x F 513**, which produces our best, but still modest dwarfing when used as an interstem on *P. calleryana*. **Tennosui** proved to be only weakly compatible directly on **BA 29-C** and would not produce a useful tree. However, it is fully compatible directly on *Chanomeles* quince, and also compatible with **OH x F 51** as an interstem on the *Chanomeles*. This latter combination increases vigor and produces a spreading tree with ideal dwarfing for our area.

Another promising new cultivar for our area, Bob Zendher's South Carolina **Lemate** pear, is very large and spreading on *P.calleryana* and is extremely vigorous on **BA-29-C**, and this looks like an ideal combination with a good root anchor. Other low-chill pears directly compatible with **BA29-C** are **Abate Fetel**, a commercial-quality pear grown in Italy and South Africa, and **Epps-Greer**, an heirloom pear from Georgia with a pre-Civil War pedigree. I have a **BA29-C** in a large pot with alternate branches grafted with these three cultivars that I will plant out this winter. We hope to test some of our other pears with quince next year.

Figs Are Easy

In recent editions of the Southern Fruit Fellowship newsletter, Tom Mann of Clinton, MS and David Lavergne of Jarreau, LA offer us tips on propagating and growing figs, an ideal, heavy-producing and almost care-free crop for our local climate. Tom suggests obtaining 9-12 inch lengths of preferably upright growing scionwood, taken in the dormant season, and dipping them in a weak (1:20) Clorox solution to eliminate fungi and surface bacteria. The bundles of cuttings are then wrapped in moist (but not wet) paper toweling, placed in tightly sealed plastic bags, and placed in the vegetable crisper of a refrigerator for 1-2 months of cold stratification. They are then removed and placed in a porous rooting medium containing some sand and peat moss with only the uppermost two or three buds exposed. He recommends placing the pots in a covered, transparent container allowing high humidity and light but not allowing the emerging leaves to touch the walls. Once good growth is evident, the pots are removed to ambient temperature to grow further. Do not be in a hurry to plant them out. Figs like to grow in pots. If you are in a hurry for results, collect the wood in 6 inch lengths during the growing season, remove any leaves and figs, and allow the scion to root suspended in 3-4 inches of water in a well-lighted window sill. Once you see substantial root production, transfer the scion into a potting soil medium. I would add a third technique, which is almost as successful, of making an angled cut in the base of the leaf-free scion, dusting the cut with rooting hormone, and allowing rooting to occur directly in potting soil in the humidifying chamber that Tom describes. Tom indicates his best tasting fig is **Kazery**, brought to Mississippi from Lebanon many years ago. Here in Houston it is a medium-sized yellow fig and makes a small tree.

David, who has sent me cuttings of the best figs he has tried, and some of which I have distributed, indicates he begins to fertilize in the 2nd season with an 8-8-8 preparation applied in late March and again in late May. He prefers letting a central trunk to develop for a few feet before allowing branching.

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Figs are Easy (continued)

Multiple trunks close to the soil line favor splitting. Figs are generally shallow rooted and prefer a heavy mulch layer, which also suppress nematode growth. If you desire a very large plant, remove some branches to allow a three foot or so walk-way to the base of the trunk to aid in the harvest. Listed below are some of the figs David has sent us to try.

Improved Celeste (also called O'Rourke): Larger and ripens a week earlier and holds its crop better than classical **Celeste.**

Champagne (also called LSU Golden Celeste): Very cold hardy and also larger than classical **Celeste.**

Scott's Black: An extremely large black fig with red interior. Ripens about the same time as the Texas A&M fig **Alma**.

Tiger (also called Giant Celeste): Larger fruit than either **Improved Celeste** or **Champagne.**

Cordi (also sold as Stella): A yellow closed eye and medium-sized fig with red flesh and excellent flavor.

For a detailed discussion with photographs, visit Ray Givan of Savanna, Georgia's website at: http://home.planters.net/~thegivans/index.html

PERSIMMON RECIPES

Yvonne Gibbs had a special request for a persimmon soup recipe. Here are two from the classic volume, *Persimmons for Everyone* by Eugene and Mary Griffith.

Cream of Persimmon Soup

1 tablespoon butter	4 tablespoons flour	1 tablespoon sugar	1 cup warm milk
½ teaspoon salt	1 cup light cream	1 cup persimmon pulp	

Combine the butter, sugar, salt, and flour. Mix and heat while stirring, to make a smooth paste. Slowly add the warm milk, stirring constantly until it thickens. Add the cream slowly, while stirring until it is smooth. Add the persimmon pulp, stirring until well-blended. Serve hot or cold. An ounce of California muscatel wine may be added just before serving to provide a delicious persimmon-wine flavor.

Basic Persimmon Soup

½ cup water	¼ teaspoon salt	1 tablespoon flour	2 teaspoons lemon juice
2 teaspoons sugar	¼ cup dry white wine	1 cup persimmon pulp	

Add enough water to the flour to make a smooth paste, and then slowly add the remaining water, stirring until smooth. Add the sugar and salt. Heat while stirring constantly, and then add the lemon juice, wine and persimmon pulp, in that order. Stir until smooth. If desired, a small lump of butter or margarine may be added. If a sweet wine is used in place of the dry wine, delete the sugar.

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