

Gulf Coast Fruit Study Newsletter

Volume 24, Issue 3

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August 10, 2010 Meeting

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Next Gulf Coast Fruit Study Meeting

Our upcoming meeting is at **7:00 PM on Tuesday, August 10**. This meeting will feature our annual pear tasting with presentations including some grafting demonstrations. If you have any fruits you would like to display for the group, please bring them and we will have display tables set up.

Contact Us!

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Stone Fruit Successes

This year's low chill winter helped us with exceptional fruit set and the only casualties appear to have been some cold sensitive citrus and figs. The pear crop has been unusually heavy, and we hope to have some new varieties available to evaluate at our pear tasting in August. A pleasant surprise was the performance of some of the newer low-chill plum/apricot crosses. The very early ripening **Flavor Delite Aprium** (left panel) set an excellent crop of freestone fruit which cannot be distinguished in appearance or flavor from a true apricot. However, since true apricots only rarely are successful in Houston, despite low chill features, this is a major advance. Another excellent fruit was the **Emerald Drop Pluot**, which was much later to ripen (right panel). This cultivar is basically a clingstone plum with a greenish yellow exterior and excellent flavor. Another that set fruit is the **Splash Pluot**, which is also a yellow plum type fruit. Generally, these plants are shipped from nurseries in California and are grafted on **Halford** (*primarily used as a peach rootstock*) or **Citation** (*hybrid*) rootstock, neither of which does well long-term here. They will have much better survival on **Myrobalan 29C** or **Mariana** rootstock, which are better adapted to our soils, or to **Nemaguard** peach rootstock. I am re-grafting these cultivars on alternate rootstocks to better evaluate their performance in our area.



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There does appear to be some hope for the low-chill cherries that are now in the trade and have made their appearance in Houston. I have not heard yet of any fruit production locally, although flowering has occurred. We did sample some of these cherries grown near Abbeville, LA, at a Southern Fruit Fellowship meeting and they seemed of good quality. These varieties will ultimately need to be re-grafted on alternate rootstock other than the **Mazzard**, **Colt** or **Citation** plus a **Zee-stem** interstem rootstock they have been supplied on. Some believe the best sweet cherry rootstock choice for our area may be the Russian **Krymsk** series of rootstocks, numbered 5, 6 and 7, which have successfully supported sweet cherries. I have ordered some of these rootstocks for next season and we may give out some grafted plants for trial at our Gulf Coast Fruit Study Group sessions next season. An alternate choice may be **Myrobalan 29C** with a cherry-compatible interstem. I currently have such potential interstem material growing vigorously that I have grafted on **Myrobalan 29C** in preparation.

Jujubes

Ginger and the late Sam Powers popularized the planting of jujubes here in Houston and evaluated many cultivars. In recent years the Chinese government has funded large plantings of jujubes in mainland China and is attempting to develop a major industry with products made from these fruits. All cultivars seem to do well here in Houston, but there is no known non-stoloniferous rootstock and so annoying suckering at great distance from the parent tree remains a problem. The cultivars sold in the trade usually come from various plant nurseries grafted onto a wild jujube rootstock, and digging out root suckers to start new plants will not reproduce the purchased cultivar. However, occasional desired varieties were originally discovered as chance seedlings, such as the **Sherwood** jujube, found by the late Sherwood Akin. I have a large tree created from a rootsucker of the original tree, and so rootsuckers from my tree will reproduce a new **Sherwood** plant. Recently, Yvonne Gibbs and I were contacted by Dr. Humbert Chu, who noticed that his centenarian mother had an unusual large-fruited jujube with an upright growth habit in her backyard with root suckers that reproduced the parent fruit in a very short period of time. His mother confirms that this cultivar is the known but rarely-sold in the United States variety called **Silverhill Round** that she purchased about 35 years ago. According to Dr. Chu, this fruit is quite sweet, unlike most jujubes which taste like a poor-quality apple, if eaten fresh. He has dug and potted a number of root-sucker plants and does offer these for sale. We could not find a plant nursery in the United States currently selling this unusual variety and so he may have cornered the market.

Future Programs

Our November program will feature Richard Ashton from Brownwood, Texas who organized the first Texas pomegranates seminar which was held in San Angelo, several months ago. Some of the new cultivars have very small and rudimentary seeds, and are often marketed as “seedless”, and may be preferred cultivars for this reason. Richard said he will **try to bring some sample fruit to the November program, and we hope you can attend.**

Yvonne Gibbs is currently planning a Gulf Coast Fruit Study Group tour for mid to late October at a nearby winery which will include lunch. Further details will be forthcoming.

PEARS AND QUINCE ROOTSTOCK

Unlike apples, which have many different clonal dwarfing *malus* rootstocks available, pears have no reliable *pyrus* dwarfing rootstock. Years ago, the late Dr. Leon Atlas and I identified an ideal *pyrus* dwarfing rootstock for Houston called **Old Home x Farmingdale 51**, but this cultivar proved very difficult to propagate and is no longer in the trade, although budwood is available at no cost through the Clonal Germplasm Repository in Corvallis, Oregon. I have one such dwarf pear tree, but it does not sucker, and I cannot reproduce the rootstock. It produces a heavy crop of large **Turnbull** pears each year which the squirrels and birds greatly appreciate. Quince has long been known to dwarf pears, depending upon the cultivar, and also to induce early bearing, and rarely, larger fruit. Unfortunately, the interaction between quince and pear is extraordinarily cultivar-dependent, and trial and error is necessary to mate the appropriate quince rootstock with the desired pear. When you happen upon the proper combination, as in the Harry and David **Comice** pear, **Royal Rivera**, this is an ideal circumstance. In the right panel below is the **Tennousi** pear grown directly on **Chanomeles** quince adjacent to **Tennousi** grafted at the same time with a 12 inch interstem of **OH x F 51**. Some quince root suckers are also present to the left of center. Note the interstem greatly increases the vigor of the tree and creates a spreading shape. Unfortunately, this rootstock is not precocious and so the tree is not bearing yet. In the left panel is the **Lemate** pear (*a new variety for our area*) grafted directly to the **BA 29 C** quince, which is the specific clonal quince rootstock widely used in the Northwest. This system demonstrates precocity, yielding pears in the second year, but does not have the vigor or the root anchor of the **Chanomeles** quince system and requires some initial support. I also have the **Warren** pear on **BA29C** with an interstem of the **Conference** pear, also showing a fairly smooth and vigorous union. It flowered, but did not set this year. We hope this combination will allow us to fruit **Warren** successfully in Houston whereas grafts of this wonderful pear directly on *P. calleryana* have produced only a weakly productive large tree.



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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

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