

Gulf Coast Fruit Study Newsletter

Volume 15, Issue 2

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

January 20, 2001 Meeting

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Current Meeting:

The annual Harris County Extension Service Plant sale will begin at 8:00 a.m. on Saturday, January 20, 2001, at the extension service facility. Treesearch Farms will again be a supplier of a variety of plants and we will also have a group of hand grafted pear varieties for our area which are not sold commercially. There will be the usual demonstrations on grafting and pruning techniques.

Contact Us!

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Apricot Cultivation

The apricot testing group of NAFEX has been reformulated and we are looking for new varieties to test in the South. Mr. Don Raynaud, of Houston, has a low-chill variety he grew from seed. **Lorna** is a new USDA release, which is very large and which we are testing locally. If you have a local "find" that you think is worth propagating, please let me know.

The apricot (*Prunus armeniaca*) is believed to have originated in northern China and was introduced into Europe in about 70 BC. The fruit made its way into California in about 1850. Because the trees grow best in mild, dry climates, most commercial production is confined to California, Washington, and Utah. When fully grown, a standard tree may reach 30 feet and has a life-span of 75 years. Included among the major species are *P. mandshurica*, native to Korea and Manchuria, and *P. siberica*, a cold hardy type, used for root-

stock.

Blossoms occur in late February and early March, in Houston. The fruit is borne on spurs. Some varieties, such as **Goldcot**, are self-fertile, while others, including **Moorpark**, **Goldrich**, and **Tilton**, are partially self-fruitful, setting a larger crop with an alternate pollinator. The commercial varieties, **Perfection** and **Blenheim (Royal)**, require a pollinator. Chill hour requirements for apricots vary widely among cultivars and those with requirements of less than 500 hours are **Katy**, **Gold Kist**, and **Harriet**. The previous group are the standard, yellow fleshed varieties. White fleshed types are also under test and include **Canada Light**, which is said to also be very ornamental. This one should be tried here but will require a pollinator. **Lorna**, a new USDA release with fruit size up to 220 gms is also under trial in Houston.

Apricot rootstock does

not tolerate wet soil, even for brief periods, and is unsuitable in Houston. The trees are usually grafted on peach (**Citation**, **Nemaguard**, **Okinawa**, or **Halford**). Some varieties such as **Canino** and **Goldcot**, however, do very poorly on peach. **Myrobalan** (*P. cerasifera*) will work with some cultivars, and Herb Durand's cross of *P. Jacquemonti* x *P. angustifolia* works well here as an understock for apricot. Another effective choice is **Marianna** (*P. cerasifera* x *P. munsoniana*). Dwarfing can be obtained by grafting to *P. armeniaca manchuricus*, the **Western Sand Cherry** (*P. besseyi*) or **St. Julian** (*P. institia*). The latter rootstock does not do well in our wet soils.

The trees may be trained as an open center or as a central leader style. The major enemies in Houston are late frosts, which cause fruit drop, and the curculio moth. A full apricot crop has been a rare sight in Houston.

Southern Fruit Fellowship Meeting

For those who like advance notice, the annual Southern Fruit Fellowship Meeting will be near Sarasota, Florida. The meeting will begin the afternoon of Monday, July 30, 2001, with the scientific program all day Tuesday and tours on Wednesday. Ron Lambert, who owns a major nursery, will be our host. The program will particularly cover more tropical fruits such as lychee, banana, fig, papaya, jackfruit and mangos as well as citrus and persimmon. There are beautiful beaches in the immediate area and we will be within 15 miles of the Sarasota airport. Further details will be in Pomona and the Southern Fruit Fellowship newsletter.

New Varmint in Town

I had a visit from Floyd Brown, an inspector for the Texas Department of Agriculture, who was looking for the Flat Scarlet Mite (*Cenopalphus pulcer*). He visited here because this critter has been in the Northwest for about 10 years and was thought possibly to have entered Texas on pear graftwood shipped from the National Repository at Corvallis, in Oregon. Apparently this is not a particularly destructive pest but would be new in Texas. Fortunately none were identified.

A Rooting Tip

Certain plants are very difficult to root from cuttings. Despite hormone dips they seem to be reluctant to develop callus formation and subsequent roots. Oaks and pecans are in this category as are many desirable apple and pear rootstocks. A contributor to the NAFEX chat line suggests the following. First, in August/September, make a stab incision completely through the center of a branch or twig that you will eventually remove to root. Pass a toothpick through the incision and allow it to remain in place for about 8 weeks. Now detach the branch below the incision and dip it in rooting solution and allow it to root over the winter in a greenhouse or coldframe. The theory is to get some externalized callus to form while the twig is still growing so that rooting will be easier.

Apricot Bars

1 c., white flour	1/3 c brown sugar	1 T., walnuts, chopped
1 tsp., cinnamon	1/2 tsp., baking powder	1 T., cashews, chopped
1/4 tsp., salt	1-1/2 c., dried apricots	1/3 c., maple syrup

Sift together flour, sugar, cinnamon, baking powder & salt. Stir in the apricots & nuts. Add the syrup. Stir until the mixture forms a thick batter. Spread the batter into a lightly oiled 8" X 8" baking pan. Bake at 350F for 30 to 35 minutes or until the bars test done. Allow to cool slightly, cut into bars. When completely cool, spread with icing . Yield: 18 servings.

(ICING:)

1 c Icing sugar	1/2 tsp., vanilla
2 T., shortening	1 T., apple juice

Cream together sugar & shortening. Add remaining ingredients & beat until smooth.

The following two recipes are from former Houstonians Whitt and Karen Whittington, now of Goose Creek Farms, Bedford, Virginia.

Mrs. Whitt's Peach Plum Pie

2 cups, fresh peeled peaches	1/4 cup, quick-cooking tapioca
2 cups, fresh peeled purple plums	1/2 to 1 tsp., lemon peel, grated
1 T., lemon juice	1/4 tsp., salt
1/4 tsp., almond extract	Pastry for double-crust pie (9-inch)
1-1/2 cups, sugar	2 T., butter or margarine

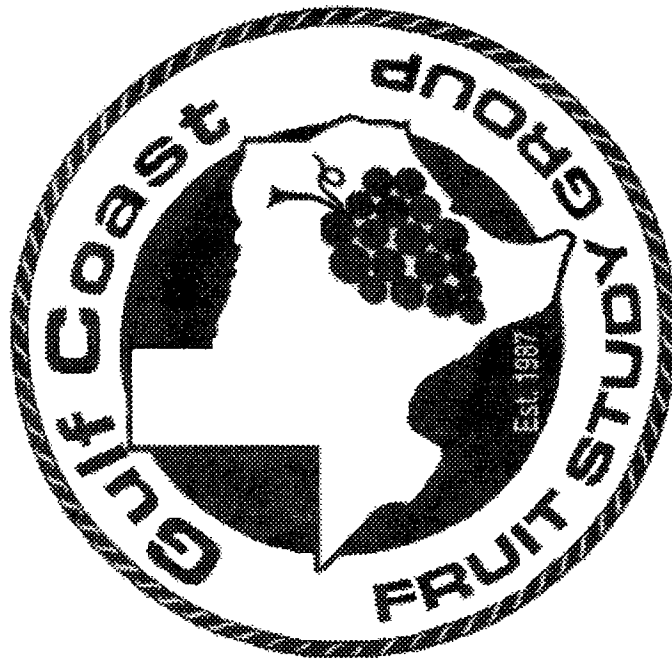
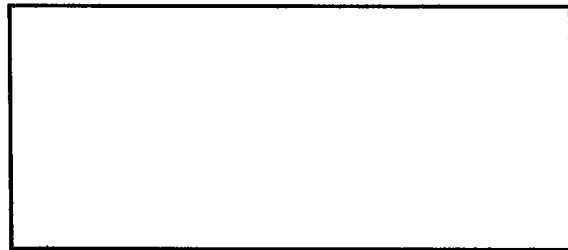
In a large bowl, combine the peaches, plums, lemon juice, and extract. In another bowl, combine sugar, tapioca, lemon peel, and salt. Add to fruit mixture and stir gently; let stand for 15 to 20 minutes. Line a 9-inch pie plate with bottom crust; add the filling. Dot with butter. Roll out remaining pastry to fit top of pie; cut slits in pastry. Place over filling. Trim, seal and flute edges. Cover the edges loosely with foil. Bake at 450 degrees, for 10 minutes. Reduce heat to 350 degrees. Remove foil; bake 35 minutes longer or until crust is golden brown and filling is bubbly. Yield: 6 to 8 servings.

Scotch Deep Apple Pie

This pie must be made in a deep pan, at least two inches deep, and if you have an earthen dish, that is the thing to use. Line the dish with a rich pie crust, then put 1/2 cupful of sugar over the bottom evenly. Now slice all the tart apples that will lie in the pan, and do not stop until you have piled them as high as possible, using a sharp knife and slicing very thin. Then put 1/2 cupful sugar over the apples, and cut bits of butter all over the top, using about 2 tablespoonfuls. Season well with nutmeg and a dash of cinnamon, and put the top crust on, after wetting the edge with cold water to seal the two crusts together, as this pie is spoiled if it runs out. When ready, place it in a hot oven at 450 degrees to brown quickly (about 10 minutes), then turn another pan over it, reduce heat to 350 degrees and cook slowly for 40-50 minutes or until apples are tender. The apples will be tender, translucent and the juice like jelly. If you do not have enough butter, use 2 tablespoonfuls water, but if this amount of butter and sugar are used, they, with the juice of the apples, make the pie juicy enough. Serve cold, with a piece of sharp cheese.

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