

Gulf Coast Fruit Study Newsletter

Volume 20, Issue 1

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January 28, 2006 Annual Plant Sale

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Next Gulf Coast Fruit Study Meetings

Our next program will be held on **April 11th**, and will be devoted to stone fruits, primarily peaches and plums. We plan to have guest speakers at this event and, as usual, will have some plants to award as door prizes. We hope you can attend.

Our program on **July 5th**, will be devoted to figs, and will feature a tasting of some of the many varieties

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Fruit Trees For The Gulf Coast Area

Generally, a suggestion for a preferred fruit tree cultivar should be accompanied by a recommendation for a particular rootstock that also performs well under our specific temperature and soil conditions. This proper combination is essential for stone and pome fruits, such as apricots, peaches and pears. For other plants, such as figs and pomegranates, there is no particular advantage of one root system over another. In certain fruits, such as citrus, one can make a useful argument for either a defined rootsystem or maintaining a plant on its own roots, depending upon the likelihood of a severe freeze which could kill the superstructure of the tree, but not affect the rootsystem, which could then regenerate the tree, if it is not a grafted specimen.

At our plant sale, on **January 28th**, we will discuss this entire subject in greater detail and show examples of many different types of fruits and many of their unique cultivars which may be successfully grown in the Gulf Coast area. As mentioned in the last newsletter, the lecture program will begin at 8 AM, with a long break from 9 AM to 10:30 AM, so that attendees may shop at the plant sale. The lecture will then resume at 10:30 AM. After another break around 11:30 AM, we will have a grafting demonstration in the auditorium at around 12:15 PM.

Pears: Our climate favors the development of fireblight and provides very little chill. For this reason, some resistance to the disease is essential, as well as the ability to flower and bear under warm conditions. **Tennessee** and **Southern Queen** are essentially immune to fireblight and are also low-chill, so these two cultivars are recommended for the lazy gardener. **Acres Home** and **Southern Bartlett** are also excellent choices, but they will get a small amount of non-fatal blight. For an Asian-type cultivar, our local discovery, **Tennosui**, is an excellent choice. The usual rootsystem in our area is *P. calleryana*, which eventually produces a very large tree. Dwarfing may be accomplished with quince rootstock (**BA 29-C**) or with interstems, but this is beyond the scope of this brief discussion but will be covered in the lecture session.

Figs: Many figs can be grown here, and individual preferences are the most important consideration. We recommend the "closed eye" varieties which prevent insect attack. **Celeste** has been successfully planted for many years and **LSU Purple** is a newer cultivar that is similar in size and also has some cold hardiness. Other local favorites are **Alma** and **Banana**. Figs are easily rooted from cuttings, but be sure you select a vertical shoot, and never a horizontal one to harvest the scion from.

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Fruit Trees For The Gulf Coast Area (continued)

Apricots: Apricots must be grafted trees because apricot rootsystems cannot take wet soils and rapidly die in Houston. Typically, **Nemaguard** is the rootstock most commonly used, but **Marianna** plum rootstock is also satisfactory. There are a number of low-chill cultivars available, including **Katy** and **Gold Kist**. Despite this, a good apricot harvest is rare in our area, and we do not usually recommend apricots for Houston.

Plums: A number of rootstocks support plums, including **Nemaguard** and **Marianna**. Of the cultivars generally recommended, **Methley** remains a good choice. We also like the newer releases, **Gulf Blaze** and **Gulf Beauty**. These are not particularly sweet, but their early bearing avoids curculio pest damage, and they have good size and production. Others that are successful here are **Inca** and **Shirley**, which are smaller, but productive. In colder areas of the Gulf Coast, **Elephant Heart** has been grown successfully.

Peaches: Here we have had the most success with **Nemaguard** and **Okinawa Hybrid** rootsystems. This may be changing and recent trials with newer selections such as **Cadaman** and **Controller 5** have been very successful in Texas. Numerous cultivars have been used here, and many growers like **Tropic Sweet** and **Midpride**. David Byrne of Texas A&M has released a number of excellent cultivars such as **Tex Star**, **Tex Royal** and **Tex Prince**. Certain peaches such as **Red Baron** and **Chelena** have beautiful flowers and acceptable, but not outstanding, peaches. In order to have success, and nice-looking fruit, some spray program is essential, as well as protection from birds and squirrels.

Nectarines: What is said for peaches is the same for nectarines. The two of best quality and with disease resistance that I have fruited here are **Karla Rose** and **Sunmist**. Others are also available.

PlumCots: These are beautiful fruits when they come to our supermarkets from California, but we have not yet found a good cultivar for our area. A relatively new release, **Springsatin** produces here, but is not of high quality. Others, such as **Flavorella**, are under trial. Most of the better varieties are too high-chill for the Gulf Coast area. Their preferred rootsystems are identical with those for peaches or plums and plumcots may be pollinated by either apricots or plums.

Apples: While we have a number of excellent cultivars for our area, the best and most long-lived rootsystems for Texas have yet to be defined. Most commercial rootstocks have eventually died here from soil-borne diseases, but one can successfully grow apples in Houston. The two often promoted are **Anna** and **Golden Dorsett**, which require very little chill to bear. Of the commercial varieties, **Mutsu (Crispin)** and **Hudson's Golden Gem** are also successful. Other well-recognized names that would fare better in our colder areas are **Fuji** and **Gala**.

Jujubes: These plants are ideal for the lazy gardener. They survive in heat, flooding and drought, and require no spraying for good production. There is no preferred rootsystem, and most are grown on the wild jujube, which is stoloniferous (suckers). The latter is not a major problem, if you own a lawnmower. There is a known non-stoloniferous rootsystem (*Cascara sagrada*), but it would be difficult to find commercially. There are an infinite number of cultivars available, with some such as **Tigertooth** being bush-like and others, like **Sherwood**, extremely vigorous and upright. Some can eventually be massive, like **Lang**, while some, such as **So**, have eye-catching curb appeal with their irregular branching. Still others have sweeter fruit, such as **Candy Cane**.

Asian (Oriental) Persimmons: These plants are generally grown either on the native wild American persimmon, *D. virginiana*, or the Asian persimmon, *D. lotus*. Each rootsystem has its advantages. The cultivars are loosely divided into the astringent and the non-astringent types. Among the former are **Gianbo** and **Saijo**, and among the latter are **Suruga**, **Izu** and **Fuyu**. All cultivars are low-chill, and can be grown here in Houston. I would generally recommend **Saijo**, which requires no care, seems to have little attraction for pests, and can easily be made non-astringent by soaking the firm fruit in repeated changes of water over 48 hours. **Suruga** has an excellent and unique flavor, but it takes a long while to ripen on the tree and by that time you have lost the battle with two and four-legged assassins.

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Fruit Trees For The Gulf Coast Area (continued)

Pomegranates: There are many cultivars available, and these plants are generally rooted from cuttings, like figs. Pomegranates sucker, like crepe myrtles, and like the latter can be trained either as a bush or as a tree. In general, they are care and pest-free, but the fruit may split with uneven watering and also may get a blackish appearance on their surface, without fungal sprays. This does not seem to impair flavor. Production is heavy with **Cloud**, **Eversweet**, and many others. Avoid buying **Wonderful**, the most widely sold nursery variety, and which is very disease susceptible, as it will not survive long in Houston.

Citrus: Citrus provide the largest yields, by weight, of any fruit we can grow along the Gulf Coast, and you will always produce far more fruit than you and your family can consume. There are an infinite number of varieties. These are generally grafted onto *trifoliata* or its sport, **Flying Dragon** in order to improve tolerance to our soils and to give some size control, as well as induce early bearing. Many alternate rootstocks are also used. For those starting out, we generally recommend any of the mandarin varieties, such as **Owari**, and its cousin, **Brown Select**, which can tolerate some fairly cold weather. A tree that is genetically somewhat dwarfed is the **Kara Kara** navel orange, particularly when grafted on *trifoliata*. Many other oranges, such as the **Republic of Texas** orange, have been grown here for many years. The most cold sensitive citrus are the limes, which should be container grown. Many of the grapefruits and the **Meyer** lemon, in particular, can also take considerable chill, and bear heavily here. Care of citrus is minimal, with occasional oil sprays. A recent pest is the leaf miner, which does require some type of pesticide application if you wish to have nice-appearing and healthy trees. Citrus trees may be viral-infected, which is of concern in citrus-growing states such as Texas, Florida, and California. If grown from seed, viral infection is generally not a problem, but it may take 6-7 years to bear, and the tree may eventually be huge.

Mulberry: Many mulberries grow as native plants in the Houston area, spread along fence lines by birds. **Pakistan** is a favored cultivar, because of its size, and is a nice-looking landscape tree. If you plant this one, the birds may beat you to most of the fruit, which is large and tasty. Mulberries are typically all graft-compatible with each other and the preferred cultivars are generally grafted to a wild mulberry seedling or may be rooted cuttings. A distant cousin to the mulberry, the **Chinese Che**, must be grafted onto the **Osage Orange** (This rootstock is neither an orange nor a pear, despite its common designation as the **Bodark** pear. It produces a large, resinous and seedy fruit, and the wood is used for fence posts) because of the Che's stoloniferous habit. It generally is grafted high because it may have a drooping character as the tree gets older. The **Che** fruit is similar to a mulberry in flavor but red and more round than elongated.

The Gulf Coast Fruit Study Group is on the Internet

If you have the opportunity, log into the new Internet site Carol Brouwer has designed. The url is <http://harris-tx.tamu.edu/hort/fruit.htm>

Here you can rapidly access old and current newsletters and have links to many other sponsored gardening programs. If you have any suggestions for Carol, please bring them to our next meeting. I would like to see photographs of some of the fruits we recommend available on the site, if this is possible.

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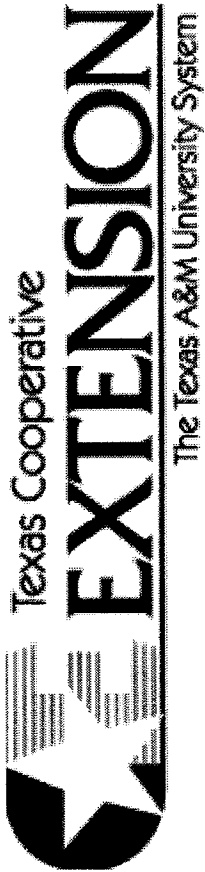
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Annual Plant Sale

On January 28, 2006, beginning at 9:00 a.m., and adjacent to the extension center, we will have our annual plant sale of many fruit varieties suitable for the Gulf Coast area.

We will also have a formal presentation discussing and showing slides of many of these varieties from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. in the conference area. We will break from 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. for the plant sale and then resume the formal presentation from 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. After another break around 11:30 a.m., we will have a grafting demonstration in the auditorium around 12:15 p.m.



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

