

# Gulf Coast Fruit Study Newsletter

Volume 16, Issue 4

Edited By: Ethan Natelson

June 12, 2003 Meeting

## Planning Committee:

Carol Cammack  
Yvonne Gibbs  
George McAfee  
Ethan Natelson  
David Parish  
Bob Randall

## New Plums for Old

By the time of this publication I will have harvested my first crop from two new plum introductions for the Deep South, *Gulfbeauty* and *Gulfblaze*. The published descriptions of these Japanese plums are very accurate.\* Both are extremely precocious and very low-chill (no more than 250 hrs), and for this reason I lost all my blossoms after a late frost last year. These bloom well before *Methley*, *Inca*, *Shirley* and other low chill plums that we regularly fruit in Houston. Since neither of the new plums is self-fruitful, one must either plant both or provide *Gulfruby*, a prior introduction from the same breeding program. Their size is a bit larger than *Methley*, but smaller than *Bruce*, the latter a heavy bearing but poor quality plum formerly sold here and which is in the genetic background of the new plums. Both are clingstones, with deep red

skin and yellow and orange flesh, respectively. Like *Methley*, *Gulfbeauty* and *Gulfblaze* do not seem particularly attractive to curculio, which totally spared them this year, in contrast to other plums I have. The new plums are alleged to bloom later in higher chill areas, but major differences in chill hours here between last year and this year did not affect our bloom time. Both cultivars set well for me this year. The fruit colors nicely, and the trees have a naturally spreading shape which should keep their size down and facilitate harvest. Some will recall we tasted *Gulfblaze* during our Southern Fruit Fellowship (SFF) meeting in Tallahassee, and the flavor was excellent. Their long-term resistance to bacterial canker in our humid climate remains to be evaluated.

This year I also planted two new plum hybrids offered by Raintree Nurseries. The first is the *Flavorella* plum X apricot cross, claimed to require only 300 chill hours and which requires a Japanese type plum as a pollinator—possibly either of the three low-chill plums mentioned above will do. We have yet to find a plumcot that bears well or bears at all in our area, but most have been rated higher chill than this one. Nevertheless, hope springs eternal, since the taste of these crosses is often unique. The second is *TriLite*, a self-fertile peach X plum cross, rated at 600 chill hours.

## Current Meeting:

Our program will begin at 7:00 p.m. on June 12, 2003 at the Extension offices at the Bear Creek Facility. New varieties of brambles will be discussed. Please bring any fruit you can share with us to sample.

## Contact Us!

Harris Cty Extension Service  
2 Abercrombie Road  
Houston, TX 77080  
Phone: 281/855-5611  
Fax: 281/855-5638

\* Sherman, WB, and Lyrene, PM, 'Gulfbeauty' and 'Gulfblaze' Japanese-Type Plums. *Fruit Varieties Journal* 52:19, 1998.

## You Can Be a Fruit Explorer

Being a fruit explorer sounds like an exotic endeavor, but it is really quite simple and always gives one a sense of accomplishment, especially if you discover and propagate a winner. Both professionals and amateurs may develop a new fruit by various breeding techniques, but nature is also in the same business. Here are a few examples.

Along the Gulf Coast we are always seeking both tasty and cold hardy citrus that may be planted in the backyard, given minimal care, and yet survive our occasionally frigid weather. Unfortunately, citrus crosses, which contain the extremely cold hardy wild trifoliata in their parentage, are usually seedy and barely edible. Enter the fruit explorer. One of my fellow Southern Fruit Fellowship (SFF) associates, Lee Sharp, heard of a large and unusual orange tree in Biloxi, MS, located far from any structure and in an unprotected area, that produced delicious fruit every year. It had been planted from a seed which had

outgrown its pot and rooted itself around 1960. The children of the individual who planted the seed indicate that the tree has withstood temperatures from 7 to 10 degrees during at least 6 winters since that time, without injury, and fruits heavily every year. Lee and Tom Becnel, a professional citrus grower from Louisiana, visited the tree and took cuttings, one of which I have grafted, and collected fruit. They estimated the tree height at 20 feet and trunk diameter at 9 inches, measured one foot above the ground. They (and I) tasted the fruit, which was supermarket grade in appearance and, according to Tom, similar to a Valencia in flavor.

George McAfee, a fruit explorer who seems to know where every fruit tree in Houston is planted, discovered a seedling pear growing in the Acres Home subdivision. The fruit was large, pyriform, and nice looking. We have propagated the tree, and it is growing in

both the Ft. Bend and Bear Creek experimental orchards. It is precocious, with a spreading shape, fruiting in only 3 years, is extremely low-chill, seems fairly resistant to fireblight, and produces a large, extremely uniform pear which we have tasted as about a 7-8 on a scale of 10. This year I have crossed it with some higher quality pears to see if it can be improved on, since it has so many excellent qualities for our area.

Another SFF member from Jackson, MS, Tom Mann, sent me an unusual fig that has been passed through generations of a neighboring family since around 1920, when it was smuggled in from Lebanon. He claims this large, round, yellow fig is the most outstanding one in their area, for both fresh eating and drying. I have a rooted cutting, and we plan to evaluate it for the Houston area.

Just polish your observation skills, have a little patience, enjoy watching things grow, and you, too, can be a fruit explorer.

## Blueberry Fruit Salad

- |   |                                 |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 1 12 oz. whipped topping                    | 1 12 oz. creamed cottage cheese |
| 1 3 oz. jello (any flavor—try Black Cherry) | 1/2 cup chopped pecans          |
| 1 8 oz. crushed pineapple, drained          | 2 cups blueberries              |

Blend dry jello into whipped topping. Add cottage cheese, pineapple, and nuts. Blend thoroughly. Fold in blueberries. Chill several hours or overnight.

Source: *Southern Fruit Fellowship* newsletter (Issue 59, Jan.-Mar. 2003)

## The Best Pear

A frequently asked question is, "What is the best pear for our area?" Because of individual preferences in appearance, texture and flavor, there probably cannot be a single answer to this question. Ideally we are looking for a pear that bears early (precocity). Some will bear in as little as 2-3 years, others may take 10-12 years. It also should be resistant to fireblight, our nemesis for pear culture in the Gulf Coast area. It must be low-chill, and, thus bear regularly in winters providing our scanty 400-600 chill hours. The tree should have a spreading shape and not rapidly become too large for the yard. It should also have attractive foliage and resist leaf spot diseases. Most would also favor a pear tree with fruit of reasonable size and attractive exterior.

We will have our annual pear tasting session on August 12. Each year, we have an increasing number of varieties, but we remain in pursuit of the ideal. The cultivars mentioned below, and which we have a number of years' data on, have many good qualities.

**Warren:** A clear 10, is the gold standard for flavor, and also has a nice and uniform appearance. Unfortunately, the tree takes at least 10 years to bear and never will produce a heavy crop. It would like about 600-700 chill hours but this is not the answer to shy bearing. We do not recommend it.

**Tennessee:** About an 8 for flavor and appearance. Has medium size with an oval shape and with a red blush. It is totally resistant to blight but makes a very large tree with a spreading shape and nice green leaves. Studies are in progress to dwarf it. We recommend it.

**Southern Bartlett:** Also about an 8 for flavor and appearance but larger than Tennessee and more pyriform. A very heavy bearer but takes about 5-6 years to come into full bearing and flavor. Not quite as blight resistant as Tennessee, but the problem is minimal. The tree has a spreading shape and is not quite as large as Tennessee on our standard *P. calleryana* rootstock. We recommend this pear.

**Acres Home:** Very precocious, often bearing at 3 years with large, uniform and attractive pyriform fruit, which is also rated as an 8, with a mild citric acid flavor and some crunchiness. Gets a little more blight than does Southern Bartlett, but still minimal. The tree has a spreading shape and has growth rate about the same as Southern Bartlett. Leaves not as attractive as Tennessee. We recommend it.

**Leona:** About the right size for a backyard tree and has a spreading shape. Takes about 8 years to fully bear and really likes at least 600 chill hours. Gets more blight than Acres Home, and this reduces fruit production. The fruit is large and uniform, with an apple shape, and rates a 7 ranking. Quite firm unless properly ripened to a slightly greenish yellow color. Recommended for the younger more active gardener, who can prune out and spray for blight and wait for bearing.

**Southern Queen:** Because of late freezes, hail, and lack of bearing trees, we have been slow to fully evaluate this very promising pear. We have a good crop this year. The tree has excellent foliage, modest growth, blight resistance about the same as Southern Bartlett and is extremely low chill, probably in the 300 hour range. It is always among the first to flower here.

The fruit is medium in size, mildly russeted and very pyriform. It is somewhat similar in appearance to Moonglow but of better quality. We rate it about a 9, unfortunately not quite as good as Warren, but close. The tree takes about 4-5 years to bear well. We recommend it highly.

For those who like the firmness of an Asian pear, and do not mind the lack of sweetness characteristic of an Asian variety, the following are considerations:

**Baldwin:** An old standard for the South. Requires only about 200 chill hours. A very large fruit, which, if properly ripened, is not bad, perhaps a 6-7 in flavor. Takes about 5 years to bear well and is very productive.

**Meadows:** Early to bear, productive, disease-resistant, but has a very upright shape and soon becomes too tall to pick without a large ladder or other device. Fruit is attractive, firm, medium in size with sort of a winey flavor when fully ripened. We are attempting to modify tree shape and height with the use of interstems.

We have many other varieties with interesting fruit sizes, shapes and colors, which will be available for tasting at our August 12th session, including several never before fruited in Houston and which may be winners. Plan to come out and judge for yourself.

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