

# Gulf Coast Fruit Study Newsletter

Volume 26, Issue 2

Edited By: Ethan Natelson

June 21, 2012 Meeting

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## Growing Asian Persimmons

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As a young boy, I was introduced to the wild American persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*) by being asked to gather its fruit to be used at my home for a Thanksgiving salad. I observed the wild persimmon growing almost anywhere, in almost any kind of soil, wet or dry, and that the plant would not succumb even to bush-hogging. As a retiree, I learned that Asian persimmons (*Diospyros kaki*) could be easily grafted onto the *Diospyros virginiana* rootstock, which gave birth to the thought that even I could grow Asians persimmons. My present process for growing Asian (*kaki*) persimmons will be detailed in the subsections below, but first, I will convey some of my experiences with persimmon cultivation.

On an annual basis, expect about fifteen to twenty percent of all *kaki* persimmons grafted onto *virginiana* persimmon rootstock to eventually die – even after 15-20 years of successful production. This failure could be from genetic incompatibility between the two individual cultivars as the rootstock usually survives. The closer the compatibility, the longer the grafted union survives. Over time, expect your persimmon orchard to contain trees of all ages with the oldest specimens among those planted first; therefore, it is necessary to plan for replacements each year. This planning involves considerations of cultivar size, spacing of trees, varieties to be selected, maintenance, and they entire layout of your orchard. Commit to paper the completed orchard with a schematic drawing including identification of each tree planted along with those cultivars proposed for later addition. Locate persimmon growers in your area and learn from their successes and their mistakes. Join a fruit growers association, like SFF. Learn to propagate persimmons and practice techniques of budding and grafting. Find a source (s) for bud wood and accurately named scions. The Internet is a very helpful source of information and experts, most of whom are only too happy to help you.

## Next Gulf Coast Fruit Study Meeting

Our upcoming meeting is at **7:00 PM on Thursday, June 21**, with a discussion by Dr. Bob Randall on Figs for the Gulf Coast Area.

## Contact Us!

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## Growing Asian Persimmons (continued)

### Seed Collection:

Collect *virginiana* ripe fruit when the fruit drops from the tree, usually in August through September. Place the collected ripe fruit in a five gallon plastic container and cover with water. After observing the first fermentation bubbles, let the fruit continue to ferment for about four days. Then use a potato masher to separate pulp from seeds. Next, use a water hose to apply high water pressure to continue separating seeds from pulp. Discard everything except the seeds. Good seeds will settle on the bottom. Dry the seeds in sunshine for about two days, then bag them in a closed container and store in a vegetable bin of the refrigerator until November. In late November, stratify the seeds in layers separated with damp sand and return them to the refrigerator in a closed container until March.

### Preparing the Seedbed:

One must think of the seed bed as the beginning of an orchard. It can be about two feet deep comprising a mixture of compost and perlite. This provides a loose mixture that both supports seedling growth well and permits the seedlings to be removed whole, and without removal injury from the bed during the dormant season. It also allows easy spacing which contributes to easy budding and grafting. It can also be designed to allow for a watering system. The seed bed can be constructed at any time prior to March, but after you have planned your entire orchard.

### Plant and Grow Seeds:

March is the time to plant persimmon seeds in the prepared seedbed. Rows one inch deep can be made about eight inches apart. This allows for a two by six walk board to be placed between rows as needed for maintenance or grafting. Drill an abundance of seeds in each row, cover with the perlite/compost mixture, pressed firmly over the seeds. Germination usually takes place in April or early May. Thin as necessary to acquire a complete stand spaced about eight inches apart. Regular maintenance throughout the growing season will produce excellent seedlings for budding in August and grafting in early March.

### Budding and Grafting:

Chip budding seems to be fast and very effective during the month of August. Select the seedlings that closely match the size of the stems containing the selected buds and follow the method for chip budding. Some of the seedlings may not have grown to appropriate size to chip bud making the process tedious and labor intensive. These smaller seedlings can be left in the seed bed until late February or early March when they can be cleft-grafted and immediately transplanted. One advantage of the seed bed process is to know the success rate from the August chip budding session, which allows one to collect and store scions in early February to be use for the March cleft graft, thereby giving one an opportunity to utilize all of the year's supply of rootstock.

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## Growing Asian Persimmons (continued)

### Establishing the Orchard:

Now that you have your seedbed planted and you know what you want and where it should be placed, you can start establishing your persimmon orchard as soon as the seed bed seedlings become dormant. This occurs in late November or early December, at which time the successfully budded seedling should be transplanted into your preselected orchard location. Leave the remaining seedlings in the seedbed until late February or early March at which time they can be bench grafted with a cleft graft and transplanted immediately. Trees are now placed in your orchard and you are ready for the growing season and routine maintenance.

### Maintenance:

With the first sign of spring growth from your planted persimmon trees, remove the top part of the budded seedlings from closely above the grafted buds to 'force' growth from the desired bud. Also remove all of the natural growth buds from the rootstock below the grafted bud – this may need to be repeated weekly until it becomes unnecessary. When the grafted bud begins to grow, spray with an insecticide to prevent caterpillars and other insects from feeding on the new growth and destroying your effort. To establish a straight and well-balanced tree, stake with a sturdy four to eight foot bamboo pole and tie loosely the new growth to the stake with flagging tape. Pinch off side limbs as they appear until the desired height is achieved. Protect young trees from deer and rabbit damage with a plastic guard. To establish tree growth, remove blooms and/or fruit from young trees until they are about five years old. After five years, thin fruit to achieve desired fruit size and attractiveness. Except for cutting off above the graft, follow the same procedures for those seedlings cleft-grafted in early March. Be alert for growth occurring below the grafted union, and remove it.

In conclusion, I exert writer's privilege and prejudice for you to contemplate the following: Carl Linnaeus was known for developing a classification system for indentifying plants and animals – domain, kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, and species. He stipulated that studying and understanding nature reveals evidence for the creative powers and perfect orderliness of all living things.

Editors Note: *Like Hercule Poirot, Agatha Christie's Belgian detective, Jerry has applied order and method to the cultivation of kaki persimmons. Still, it is sad to contemplate the inevitable death of a beautiful and productive kaki grafted on virginiana and it would be useful to develop a clonal rootstock with long-lasting compatibility. Jerry Lehman had initiated such a project, in association with a university breeding program in Indiana but I do not know its current status.*

## The Annual Southern Fruit Fellowship Meeting 2012

The 2012 annual meeting of the Southern Fruit Fellowship will be held Thursday evening, August 9, 2012, through Saturday noon, August 11, 2012, in and around the south Mississippi area.

A block of rooms has been reserved at Holiday Inn Express & Suites, a very nice new hotel near Interstate 59 in Picayune, Mississippi which has a nice free breakfast area. The physical address is 1001 Dauphin Street, Picayune, MS 39466. It is located at Exit 4 on I-59 about 15 miles north of the I-10/I-12 intersection at Slidell, LA. Rooms are \$79.99 for either a king/1bed or queen/2 bed room. Call **601-749-2626** and identify yourself as a member of Southern Fruit Fellowship to get the special rate. You can also make reservations on through the Internet, at their website, [www.hiexpresspicayune.com](http://www.hiexpresspicayune.com). You will need to enter the Group Code SFF and the dates August 9, 2012, to August 11, 2012. The hotel is holding a block of rooms for us until July 15, 2012. If you have any questions or need other assistance, call Rachel Cothran, who is in charge of our group reservation at the hotel or e-mail her at [Rachel.c@hiexpresspicayune.com](mailto:Rachel.c@hiexpresspicayune.com). After July 15<sup>th</sup>, rooms will be on an as available basis, and with standard rates. This is a very busy hotel so be sure to get your reservations in early if you plan to attend.

On Thursday night there will be an informal time of fellowship beginning around 6:00 P.M. (or whenever you arrive) in the hotel breakfast area. Bring lots of your fruit and fruit products for the members to sample while we visit and share our experiences. Also bring plants and cuttings to share with others. The details for the conference will be handed out at that time. There will be a registration fee of around \$20.00 per person payable at the time of registration at the hotel.

On Friday morning we will be participating in the Muscadine Field Day held at the USDA McNeil Station which is a muscadine grape repository containing 250-300 different muscadine cultivars. We will be able to taste the various varieties and check the data on their production that the station has kept over the years. They are also doing research on pomegranates, blackberries and blueberries which we can check out. We will go to the Thad Cochran Southern Horticulture Lab in Poplarville for lunch and talks with the scientists that are conducting research at the stations. After we finish in Poplarville, we will tour the Crosby Arboretum in Picayune which is the premier native plant conservatory in the southeast.

Our Friday night meal will be at Ryan's in Picayune which has a great buffet which features steak and seafood and so much more. We will have our business meeting and a PowerPoint presentation on low-chill sweet cherries in Houston by Ethan Natelson. If others have presentations they would like to make, contact Ethan at [natelson@pipeline.com](mailto:natelson@pipeline.com) to be included in the program.

Saturday morning, we check out of the motel and head back to Poplarville where we meet the station personnel for a trip to the Stone County Research Plots where they are breeding early and late blueberries, hybrid grapes and they have apples, pears, persimmons, plums, peaches and kiwi. While there really won't be anything to sample, there will be a lot of things to see and they have the data on what has done well in the heat and humidity. After we finish, everyone is free to do what they want. Wiggins is located on Highway 49 which is four lane route going north and south. Hattiesburg is about 40 miles to the north and crosses I-59 which goes northeast and

southwest. Interstate 10, which runs east and west, is about 20 miles south and the casinos on the coast are about 25 miles away.

Please make the effort to attend and spend some quality time with SFF members and check out the progress on the new varieties of various fruits that are being bred. We look forward to seeing you in August. If you have any questions feel free to contact us. Any members of the Gulf Coast Fruit Study Group are invited to attend. Just register as above with the SFF logo. After attending one of these meetings, you will be hooked. Membership is only \$12.00 per year. This is a long drive, about 360 miles, I believe, but it is better than struggling through the security lines at the airport and you can take fruits and often plants home with you.

## WHAT IS MY FAVORITE FIG?

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*I am often asked to recommend a fig variety to customers. With over 70 varieties in stock at our nursery, this is not an easy task. Yes, I said over 70 different varieties! Here are my own observations concerning some well-know varieties.*

**Malta** (aka Celeste, Sugar Fig, Blue Celeste, Tennessee Mountain Fig, Celestial, Honey Fig) is the rather small but delightfully tasty fig that most people remember from their childhood. A very dependable producer of high quality, especially sweet figs even in unfavorable weather due to its small, tightly closed eye. These light brown to violet brown figs are excellent for eating fresh, dried or in preserves. It is a good fig no doubt, but there are better varieties available. In particular, Dr. Ed O'Rourke of Louisiana State University has created many fig hybrids over the years. Some were released years ago and some have just recently been released. Obviously, all are good for Louisiana.

**Hollier** is an older release with greenish yellow figs having amber flesh of excellent flavor. It is a dependable producer of medium sized figs up to 2 inches in diameter.

**LSU Everbearing** is also an older release. It bears its medium sized, yellow-green figs over an extended season. These have white to amber flesh of high quality.

**LSU Gold** is relatively new. It produces huge figs of a bright golden color with tender, exceptionally sweet, amber flesh.

**LSU Purple** is another relatively new variety. It bears dark purple figs over an extended period. These have light strawberry red flesh of excellent flavor with high sugar content.

**Champagne** (aka Golden Celeste) is one of LSU's newest releases. It bears yellow figs with caramel colored flesh of outstanding taste and quality.

**O'Rourke** (aka Improved Celeste) is another of LSU's newest releases. It produces medium sized figs with light brown skin and amber flesh. Good flavor and later production than 'Celeste'.

**Tiger** (aka Giant Celeste) is also one of LSU's newest releases. It produces large brown figs with yellow to gold flesh and faint outer stripes. Again, it has good flavor and bears later than 'Celeste'.

Of course, these are not the only good figs, but all are worthy of trying provided you have the room. If you have even more space, you should also consider some of these other varieties:

**Beall** produces some of the largest figs available. They are much larger than 'LSU Gold' and are almost as dark as 'LSU Purple' in color. The flavor is excellent and though not producing many figs at once, produces them over an extended period.

**Brown Greek** also has very large figs. They are brown as the name indicates with tender, sweet, reddish flesh. One of the main attractions of this variety is that it produces figs almost all season long.

**Florentine** is also known as the Italian Honey Fig. It produces figs just as large as those of 'LSU Gold' but much sweeter when conditions are right. They are lemon green with honey colored flesh.

**Guilbeau French** has medium sized, golden brown figs that are produced nearly all summer long. The flesh is pink and very sweet and has been very popular wherever it is grown.

**Sal's** is a heavy producer of medium sized figs that are very dark purple to almost black in color. They have very tasty, strawberry colored flesh and are produced over an extended period. This clone is extremely hardy.

By selective planting, one can have figs for close to 6 months of the year. Choose some of these great varieties and you will be glad you did, as they are all great for Louisiana. Come rain or shine, they all do well and are all able to survive our coldest winters. Provide a little fertilizer in the spring and water during the drought of summer and your plant will reward you richly with quality produce.

## **FABULOUS FIG CAKE (Anonymous Source)**

3 eggs  
1½ cups sugar  
1 cup vegetable oil  
2 cups all purpose flour  
1 tsp salt  
1 tsp cinnamon  
1 tsp all spice  
1 tsp nutmeg  
1 tsp vanilla extract  
½ cup buttermilk  
1 tsp soda - dissolved in 2 tsp hot water  
1 cup fig preserves  
1 cup chopped pecans  
powdered sugar

Mix first three ingredients - mix well. Combine buttermilk and soda mixture (in a cup). Sift next five ingredients together, add to egg mixture alternately with buttermilk mixture - mix well after each addition. Stir in vanilla extract, figs and pecans. Pour into a greased and floured 10 inch tube pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 1 hour and 10-15 minutes. Cool 20-30 minutes. Remove from pan, and sprinkle with powdered sugar and await praise from your guests.