Gulf Coast Fruit Study Newsletter

Volume 25, Issue 1 **Edited By: Ethan Natelson** **March 29, 2011 Meeting**

Sweet Cherries for the Gulf Coast Area

There are several barriers to successful sweet cherry production in our area. The first has been the chill factor, with most *Prunus avium* requiring greater than 700 chill hours for bearing. Years ago, we did find one promising relatively low-chill cultivar, **Early Ruby**, but it lacked a pollinator and is now hard to find in the trade. For many years, the late Dr. Leon Atlas, working with Herb Durand, the latter a master at hybridizing blueberries as well as stone fruits, developed many crosses with *P. Jacquemontii*, a very low-chill ornamental bush cherry. This fruit is bright red but is more a single large seed than pulp. Herb created interesting crosses of this plant with the native **Chickasaw** plum and with the **Methley** plum, but was unable to produce a large cherry, which was also low-chill. Subsequently, *P. Jacquemontii* was crossed with *P. japonica*, to produce a small, low-chill but edible bush cherry. In the last few years, Floyd Zaiger has released possibly three true cherries that may work in our area, **Minnie Lee**, **Royal Lee** and **Royal Ranier**. Several other alleged low-chill cultivars, including **Tulare** and **Brooks** are in the trade. Thus, the chill barrier may finally have been breached. We tasted a very nice large black sweet cherry grown in the Abbeville, Louisiana area, at a recent Southern Fruit Fellowship meeting, but nobody knew its name.

The second problem for us was finding a precocious and dwarfing rootstock tolerant of our heavy wet soils, to produce a plant that could be more easily shielded from birds. **Mazzard**, a standard cherry rootstock in California, produces a massive tree that may take 8 years for satisfactory bearing. Unless it is elevated on a birm, with good drainage, it seems sensitive to bacterial canker. Another cherry rootstock, **Colt**, also makes a large tree and cannot tolerate heat and dry soil conditions (see Table). Some have used an interstem compatible with cherry grafted to the peach rootstock, **Citation**. However, **Citation** has done poorly in Houston and the South. Many trials for cherries have been conducted in Chile, and in the Northwest, and some very promising rootstocks are the **Krymsk** series (5, 6 and 7), *P. fruticosas* x *P. lannesiana*, *P. cerassus* x *P. maackii*, and a variety of *P. lannesiana*, respectively, which are all crosses developed over many years, in Russian breeding programs. They tolerate wet compact soils, and are variably dwarfing. They are also precocious with heavy fruit production. I am trying these and along with Richard Ashton, some plum rootstocks, such as **Myrobalan 29C** and **VVA-1** with various interstems that allow a three part tree with cherry on the top. Thus, the rootstock question is likely well on its way to being solved.

(continued on next page)

Next Gulf Coast Fruit Study Meeting

Our upcoming meeting is at **7:00 PM** on **Tuesday, March 29**, with a discussion on sweet cherries for Houston. We will distribute test trees as door prizes.

Contact Us!

Harris Cty Extension Service
3033 Bear Creek Dr.
Houston, TX 77084-4233
Phone: 281/855-5611
Fax: 281/855-5638

Visit us on the web: http://harris-tx.tamu.edu/hort/fruit.htm

Sweet Cherries for the Gulf Coast Area (continued)

Brown rot in our humid climate and especially fruit splitting following heavy rains are still potential problems for us. Cherries seem to imbibe water rapidly when wet near maturity. On one of our fruit tree trips several years ago we saw massive greenhouse cherry production with small trees kept in modest size containers and in synthetic soils with drip fertilization to combat these problems - certainly not a solution for the home gardener. But the real problem here will be our avian friends, who love cherries. These trees will have to be kept modest in size to allow netting to be placed over them at a strategic time to insure a good harvest.

Sweet Cherry Rootstock Information					
Name	**% of Standard**	**Precocity**	**Compatibility**	**Anchorage**	**Soil Tolerance**
Colt	80	No	Good	Good	Poor in cold dry soil
Gisela 5	60	Very	Good	Fair	Poor in wet heavy soil
Gisela 6	80	Very	Good	Fair	Wide tolerance
Gisela 12	90	Very	Good	Good	Wide tolerance
Krymsk 5	80	Very	Limited data	Good	Wide tolerance
Krymsk 6	60	Yes	Limited data	Good	Wide tolerance
Krymsk 7	50	Yes	Limited data	Good	Wide tolerance
Mazzard	90	No	Good	Good	Hates wet feet
Mahaleb	80	Slight	Fair	Good	Hates wet feet

Local citrus and freeze tolerance

We would be interested in how your various citrus fared in Houston during our recent cold snap. Although I broke pipes in our lawn watering system when temperatures reached a low of 22 degrees, I lost no trees. The Meyer lemon defoliated, as it has before, but is now recovering. The most cold hardy citrus, that I have, are the **Bloomsweet** grapefruit, the **Australian** lemon, and the **Keraji** tangerine, with only drop of a few leaves among them this year. These three have shown extraordinary cold hardiness over the years.

Meeting Notices

A combined North American Fruit Explorers (NAFEX), Southern Fruit Fellowship (SFF) and Citrus Expo Annual Meeting will be held near Orlando, Florida, November 11-13. Our hosts are Ryan Atwood of the University of Florida and Stan McKenzie, who leads the Citrus Expo Group. We will have lectures, orchard tours, a visit to the University of Florida Citrus Arboretum and the USDA Whitman Research Farm as well as local plantings. Further details will be found on the NAFEX and Southern Fruit Fellowship websites. If you can't get enough information about citrus, this meeting is for you.

Future Gulf Coast Fruit Study group meetings will be held on June 28, 2011 and August 23, 2011. We will try for a bus tour in August – September, to be later announced. The county has reduced our bus access to one trip because of the economic pressures we all face. This just means you need to grow more fruit for yourself.

Persimmon-Apple Tart with Gingersnap Streusel

(source: Southern Fruit Fellowship Newsletter, October-December 2010, Issue #90)

9 inch pie crust
1/3 cup brown sugar
3 tablespoons butter or margarine, melted
1 tablespoon cornstarch
1 cup crushed Gingersnap cookies
2 tablespoons all purpose flour
¼ cup granulated sugar
2 tart apples (1 lb. total)
4 firm ripe non-astringent persimmons (1 ½ lb. total)
2 tablespoons lemon juice

Bake pie crust in 350 degree oven until pastry is lightly browned, 10 to 25 minutes.

In a bowl stir together crushed gingersnaps, brown sugar and 2 tablespoons flour. Mix in melted butter with a fork and stir well. Mixture will have a lumpy, cornmeal consistency. Set aside.

In a large bowl, mix granulated sugar and cornstarch. Peel, core and thinly slice apples. Stem, peel and thinly slice persimmons. Add fruit to bowl along with lemon juice and mix well.

Pour mixture into pastry and shake pan to settle filling evenly, then, crumble gingersnap mixture over it.

Bake tart on lowest rack of a 325 degree oven until pastry is browned and filling bubbles, 1 hour to 1 hour and 10 minutes. Lay a sheet of foil over streusel if it begins to darken before pastry is done.

HARRIS COUNTY
MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION
3033 BEAR CREEK DR.
HOUSTON, TX 77084-4233

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