

Gulf Coast Fruit Study Newsletter

Volume 21, Issue 4

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November 13, 2007 Meeting

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Next Gulf Coast Fruit Study Meeting

Our next meeting will be on **November 13th at 7:00 P.M.** Bill Adams will be discussing the establishment of a home orchard. Please bring any early ripening citrus fruit that you have to the meeting for tasting. We will have juice presses there. This seems to be an early ripening year and many grapefruit are already ripe.

Contact Us!

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OLIVE PRODUCTION IN TEXAS

On Saturday, October 6, 2007, a hardy group of about 38 members of the Gulf Coast Study Group, our Extension Agent Carol Brouwer, and our intrepid bus driver, James Martin, a 17-year veteran of these campaigns, embarked on a 350 mile round trip journey to the north of Wimberley, Texas, to visit the first successful commercial oil-producing olive orchard ever established in this state. Yvonne Gibbs spent a great deal of time organizing this trip. What we saw and learned was fascinating, although I think all of us quickly realized that olive plantings are not something we want to attempt in the Houston area – but now we know why. The very driven owner of The Bella Vista Ranch, Jack Dougherty, gave us a rapid-fire history of the world and underworld, as seen through the eyes of an olive grower. Olives, which are extremely long-lived trees, and may bear for hundreds of years, were first imported into the United States around 1785.

Among the information that we rapidly assimilated was that olives are generally self-fertile, although bearing is augmented by wind pollination. They appear to be highly disease-resistant evergreen trees, often subject to alternate bearing, and thriving on poor but well-drained soil, in a temperate climate, subject to cool evenings. In California, the fungal disease verticillium wilt is a significant problem, but here, the major enemy is a sudden and early frost, which can freeze the sap and explode the bark, greatly damaging and often destroying the tree. Like self-rooted citrus, the damaged trees can be heavily cut back, and they will rapidly re-emerge into production. This scenario has happened twice to the Dougherty plantings, since their inception about 10 years ago.

(continued)

OLIVE PRODUCTION IN TEXAS (continued)

We also learned that these trees are usually generated from rooted cuttings, with no preferred and no known dwarfing rootstock, although the trees may be grafted by standard techniques. None of the preferred cultivars are generated by their seed because, for uncertain reasons, seed-propagated trees may revert to the small-fruited wild variety. Lack of a dwarfing rootstock is not a problem for most of the world, where vegetative growth is slow, but under the Hill Country conditions, the vegetative growth rate of the olive is the most rapid in the world, according to Mr. Dougherty, requiring two sets of serious pruning each year. Despite this, some of his trees are already at least 18-20 feet tall – a problem when all harvesting must be done by hand.

Mr. Dougherty currently has about 1,000 trees in the ground and many in pots. He indicates he has 15 varieties, most under study, but 90 % of the orchard is comprised of the vigorous **Mission** cultivar which is one of the most cold-hardy. Apparently, the fruits of the various commercial cultivars vary in size and shape from round to oval or elongated. The oil quality and content also varies, among the named cultivars, but the leaf and shape of the trees appear rather similar. Once the harvest has been accomplished, and this may need to be staggered since the fruit does not all ripen at one time, the processing is very efficient with the use of a modern compact olive mill. The olives are machine washed and then fed into a hopper leading into this processor which macerates the fruit, and then by gravity-aided centrifugation, allows the oil to flow out one channel and the frass or mash to exit another. About 92% of the total oil present in the fruit is extracted with this process and a 2nd extraction to collect the remainder, often necessary with older equipment, is not attempted. This compact and pulpy frass material is a favorite treat for his cows

We were told that mechanical harvesting, a la pecans, is frowned upon because the shaking may damage the trees and the quality of the oil, and because the fruit is held rather tightly at the stem. The fruit may be raked off the tree with the proper tools. Further, the fruit does not ripen simultaneously and turns from green with brown speckles, to brown, to black. The oil is at its finest from the brown stage, but the processing we saw was primarily from green fruit. We were also told that the prized pure olive oil from sources around the world is often “cut” or diluted with oils of other fruits because it is difficult for the amateur and consumer to tell the difference. Actually, some manufacturers add garlic or citrus peels to the processing to improve the bouquet and flavor. The ideal oil should have a clear golden color, and probably is easy to counterfeit. Because of controls on olive production and distribution in the United States, our production tonnage from California is steadily declining. The Chinese have recently taken an interest in olive oil production and eventually may become a major player in this market. Mr. Dougherty tells us that the large pizza companies in the United States are the major consumers of the fresh olive market in the world, today.

We have read in the Houston newspaper recently that a large company plans to soon begin a major commercial planting of olives in the Hill Country, but Mr. Dougherty tells us that of seven contemporary orchards attempted in this area, two have failed entirely and none of his remaining competitors have ever successfully generated substantial olive oil production, as he has. Even with global warming, I would think a major freeze could set a productive orchard back several years. Here in Houston, my **Manzanillo**, an early ripening olive, languished with minimal growth for several years, flowering, but never setting fruit. Eventually, I took it out. I believe there is another still living at the Extension Service planting – both of these were provided years ago by Treeseach Farms for a trial in our area. I think our humidity and our compact, wet soils would not be conducive to olive cultivars here.

Renaissance Orange Apple Pie

(untried recipe; adapted from www.ultimatecitrus.com)

Ingredients:

9 inch unbaked pie pastry shell and lid
5 medium oranges
3 c. water
1 c. honey
juice of 1/2 small lemon
4 medium apples, peeled, cored, and sliced
1/2 c. brown sugar
1/8 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. cinnamon
1/8 tsp. powdered ginger
1 T. confectioner's sugar, dissolved in 1 T. water

Directions:

Bake pie shell at 425°F for 10 minutes. Let cool. Slice unpeeled oranges as thinly as possible, discarding seeds. Combine water, honey, and lemon juice in a large saucepan, and bring to a boil. Add orange slices, cover, reduce heat, and simmer about 2 hours or until peel is limp and easily chewed. Drain and set aside slices. In a bowl, combine brown sugar, salt and spices. Add apple slices and toss until evenly coated. Place a layer of apple slices in pie shell, then a layer of orange slices. Repeat with remaining fruit. Place pastry lid over filling, crimp edges and slash lid in a few places. Paint lid with water icing. Bake at 350°F for 1 hour.

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