

Gulf Coast Fruit Study Newsletter

Volume 23, Issue 3

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November 10, 2009 Meeting

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Local Fruit Enthusiasts Visit Abbeville, Louisiana and Grand Junction, Colorado

There are many active regional and national fruit tree enthusiast organizations based around the country and which are primarily driven by amateur back yard growers but also populated by university-based agricultural researchers, extension agents, commercial growers, and the network of germplasm repository officials who collect and make available, usually at no cost, hard to find cultivars that are not patented and in the public domain. Some of these hobbyists have devoted many years to study of one fruit type and have remarkable knowledge about the particular fruit and, often, extensive literature on the subject as well as private collections of unusual cultivars. They are happy to have people visit and typically provide complimentary cuttings of their plants. Many of these organizations, like our Gulf Coast Fruit Study Group, have an associated journal or newsletter. In some instances these publications encourage members to write about their fruit growing experiences in the publication. Some even provide small grant support for members who wish to do independent research on a particular project and only request that a report on their findings be made available to the sponsoring group. Just a very few of these well-known organizations are North American Fruit Explorers (NAFEX), Southern Fruit Fellowship (SFF), Home Orchard Society, California Rare Fruit Growers (CRFG), Northern Nut Growers Association (NNGA) and the Midwest Apple Improvement Association (MAIA). Many such groups have an annual meeting with lectures, a scion exchange of unusual cultivars, tasting of local fruit cultivars, plant auctions, and field trips to hobbyist and institutional research station plantings. A number of Houstonians are members of NAFEX and SFF, and I thought I would briefly describe our two recent annual meeting excursions in hopes of encouraging others to attend these often very unique and enjoyable trips.

SFF met this year on July 9-11 in Abbeville, Louisiana, located in Vermilion (properly spelled with one l) Parish, with a program sponsored by Robert Turley, an Extension Agent for Calcasieu Parish. A number of local Texans attended, including myself, Bill Adams, John Panzarella, Dan Sebasta and Rick Matt. We numbered about 75 and stayed at a local motel which thought we represented a religious group and for this reason gave us a remarkably low room rate. We visited orchard locations in many of the small towns in the area by car pooling. Most people thought we were a funeral procession and so traffic was not a problem, either.

Next Gulf Coast Fruit Study Meeting

Our upcoming meeting is at **7:00 PM on Tuesday, November 10** and will feature a lecture on citrus by Mani Skaria, Professor at the TAMUK Citrus Center (Weslaco, Texas) (www.mskaria@ag.tamu.edu).

Contact Us!

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Local Fruit Enthusiasts Visit Abbeville, Louisiana and Grand Junction, Colorado (continued)

We tasted local figs, a low-chill black sweet cherry, grapes, citrus, pears and some stone fruit. Among our many tour stops we visited two adjoining large and successful orchards in New Iberia owned by the Romero brothers. They had a pick-your-own collection of citrus, persimmon, pears, grapes and other fruits. To my surprise, Mr. Eddie Romero, in telling us about his plantings in preparation for a hayride orchard tour, claimed that all of his beautiful and blight-free pear trees originated from cuttings taken when he visited me in Houston in 1989 – that is just one example of the value of networking within these organizations. When asked about fertilization, he claimed he used none aside from mulch from sugar cane frass. He said that without standard fertilization, his pears made smaller crops but never blighted. Similarly, without fertilization his persimmons avoided fruit drop following the heavier flowering, and he ended up with a more stable fruit production and smaller tree size. I brought back cuttings of a white, white mulberry cultivar that I will try to root.

We also spent time at Mr. Robichaux's orchard and test plantings. He is a pharmacist by trade but a fig enthusiast by hobby. He is responsible for evaluating and saving many of the now famous figs bred by Dr. O'Rourke, at LSU, after that program was disbanded and the plants were to be discarded. We are making some of these re-named figs available in Houston. We stopped at a large and beautiful citrus orchard with 55 heavily bearing kumquat trees – but what does one do with this vast quantity of kumquats? The answer seemed to be nothing. Professor Boudreaux, who is now in charge of fruit study at LSU, then reminded us that if you have two kumquat trees, you actually have planted one too many. We saw the results of salt damage to citrus from the storm surges in the area at another planting, where we drove around large crawfish ponds policed by wading birds, to see the trees.

Our next year's SFF meeting location is yet to be announced but likely will be held in southern Georgia. Our 2008, meeting was in Clanton, Alabama, and adjoining towns where we tasted some fine peaches, felt the breeze from a gigantic wind turbine designed to avoid orchard frost damage, and saw the value of John Neighbors' home-made hoop houses which extended successful citrus production further north than thought possible in that state.

Our NAFEX meeting was held in Grand Junction, Colorado, on August 27-29. This is an unusual and picturesque quiet and clean high desert area where many tourists like to mountain climb and mountain bike ride. The growing areas have been made fertile by canals and pumps diverting water from the Colorado River. It is becoming a retirement area and fruit production is declining consequent to rising land prices, lack of water availability, transportation costs and competition with fruit production in California and Washington as well as from countries such as Chile and China. We saw a fascinating video made by one grower and NAFEX member, Bruce Talbott, who is a fifth generation peach grower in Grand Junction. The video and film clips (including his family) from these many generations showing the transition from the use of iced rail cars and the harvesting of apples and peaches with pickers on stilts to modern production facilities. His pedigree grants him almost unlimited grandfathered water rights unavailable to newer orchard owners. Much of Colorado suffers from problems with water rights and distribution.

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On our six tour sites, we visited some grape and wine-making facilities, peach and apple pasteurizing plants and experienced some spectacular mountain views. We had an interesting series of lectures including land mapping for subsurface water by geophysical techniques, peach growing, sophisticated hoop-house development, soil management and phosphorus availability, fruit marketing, and cider making. It was hard to get lost in this area as there are only a few major roads. Nevertheless, one member of our group decided not to follow our map and instead used the global satellite positioning feature of his rental car. At one point, he was in the lead and stopped on a railroad track crossing and announced that the device had decided that we had arrived (the actual site was about 500 yards away).

Our 2010 NAFEX meeting will be sponsored by Purdue University and held in West Columbia, Indiana. The 2011 meeting will take place in Georgia and the 2012 meeting will be held in Saskatoon, Canada. Exact dates are to be announced. Unlike SFF, which always meets at a location in the South, NAFEX tries to move its annual meeting to all parts of the United States and even into Canada, to accommodate local meeting attendance from our wide membership. NAFEX often also has had successful joint meetings with CRFG, SFF, the Home Orchard Society and other organizations. The next time you are seeking an interesting short vacation and wish to learn more about fruit production and meet some very nice people, attend one of these annual meetings.

Annual Garden Faire: On September 26-27 the Mercer Society and Arboretum located at 22306 Aldine-Westfield Road is sponsoring its 3rd Annual Garden exhibition, and the Gulf Coast Fruit Study Group will have a complimentary vendor booth (M). Actually, we will not be selling anything but good will and encouraging interest in membership and attendance at our quarterly meetings and tours with conversation and hand-outs. Please stop by.

Orange Shortcake (source: recipezaar.com)

Ingredients:

2 cups flour
4 teaspoons baking powder
½ teaspoon salt
¼ cup sugar
4 tablespoons butter
1 egg
milk
6 oranges, peeled

Sauce:

1 cup orange juice
1 cup sugar
1 tablespoon orange peel, grated

Preheat oven to 425°F and lightly grease two 8” round cake pans. Mix and sift first four ingredients. Cut in butter. Beat egg in a measuring cup and fill to the ½ cup mark with milk. Add egg and milk to the first mixture, stirring quickly until a soft but not sticky dough is formed, adding more milk if necessary. Turn onto a lightly floured board and knead for a few seconds. Divide dough in half and pat each gently into prepared pans. Bake for about 12 minutes or until golden and done; turn out onto cooling rack. Remove membrane from orange sections and sugar to taste. Place sections between layers and decoratively on top of shortcake. Combine sauce ingredients, bring to a boil and pour over shortcake.

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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

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