

Gulf Coast Fruit Study Newsletter

Volume 21, Issue 3

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September 11, 2007 Meeting

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RIPENING OF FIGS

Among the many figs we can grow in Houston, some will have a closed eye (**ostiole**) while others have a slightly open eye or even a fairly widely opened eye. We generally recommend the closed eye types because the open eye creates a route of entry for various bugs (and with our heavy rains, fire ants that are now attacking even pears, in order to avoid the standing water). Once the open eye fig starts to soften the fig is immediately attacked by both birds and insects. If you try to pick it early, it does not have full sweetness and seems like tasteless mush. Two techniques which are somewhat labor intensive may promote ripening and provide protection until harvest. French growers have applied an art for centuries called, *apprêter les figues* (hastening the figs). It consists of applying a drop of olive oil in the late afternoon (appropriate for our upcoming olive orchard tour) with a toothpick to fill the eye, when the fig starts to soften. Treated figs are alleged to ripen fully 7 to 10 days faster, thus narrowing the target interval for varmint attack. In a 2005 issue of the NAFEX journal, Pomona, Ray Givan, a fig guru from Georgia, describes some success with this technique, particularly with certain varieties. But you still need some mechanical fig protection. Particularly if you are growing figs in large pots (which can be very effective), you will notice that the fruit seem to ripen from the bottom of the plant, and up. George McAfee suggests loosely wrapping the softened and enlarging fig with tinfoil, which will appropriately foil the birds until you have a chance to make your harvest. Let us know if the combination of both of these techniques allows you to finally experience the taste of a fully ripened fig which also has a nice appearance.

Next Gulf Coast Fruit Study Meeting

Our next meeting will be on **September 11th at 7:00 P.M.** and will be our annual pear tasting (and possibly jujube and Asian persimmons). We will give a formal presentation on pears discussing rootstocks, new varieties for our area, and our current recommendations based upon performance in Harris and Fort Bend Counties. Our weather has been miserable for many fruits, this year, so please bring examples of any varieties you are growing.

Contact Us!

*Harris Cty Extension
Service*

3033 Bear Creek Dr.

Houston, TX 77084-4233

Phone: 281/855-5611

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Fruit Study Group Directory

It has been many years since our first (and only) membership directory was published. Yvonne Gibbs has spent a great deal of energy in developing and editing a current directory which will allow all of us to continue to receive timely and pertinent information about our meetings and other activities. Our members will receive a copy of this document shortly after this newsletter arrives. If you find an error, please send the correction to Yvonne (9015 Autauga, Houston, TX 77050), who will correct it on the master copy and we will publish all corrections in subsequent newsletters.

Future Programs and Tours

On November 13th, 2007, Bill Adams will give a program entitled, "The Home Orchard". Bill always has excellent information and is a very entertaining speaker, so don't miss this. During a subsequent meeting, we will be repeating our grape program because many of our usual attendees missed this wonderful presentation because of the traffic disaster limiting access to the Extension Center (and regarding grapes, Bob Randall reminds me that his grape nomenclature is Mortensen's Hardy, rather than Seedless, as I had it in the last newsletter). For 2008, we plan a bus tour to visit the E.B. Peach Farm, among other locations, on June 14th. On October 25th we will tour David Shackelford's innovative Brazos Nursery in West Columbia. We will have another tour in May. Our Annual Fruit Tree Sale and Symposium will be held on January 12, 2008 with additional lectures and programs on February 5th, May 13th, September 16th and November 17th covering many fruits as well as plant propagation.

Directions To The Extension Center

The most direct route is I-10 West (Katy Freeway) to Highway 6, turning right on Hwy 6 to Patterson Road, then turning left on Bear Creek Drive (inset) and entering the large parking area. There was a major accident at Hwy 6 and Patterson just prior to our July 24th meeting and, with Hwy 6 totally closed, there was a massive traffic jam making it difficult to get to Addicks Pkwy or back to Eldridge Rd. This situation was aggravated by the construction along I-10. Alternate routes are to turn from I-10 on Eldridge, and then turn left on Patterson Road. This route is problematic following heavy rains because the first segment of Patterson Road floods easily. There is a Clay Road exit from Beltway 8 which will bring you back to Hwy 6, which is always high and dry. Our meetings start at 7:00 PM, and typically by that time traffic is thinning out.



Our 20th Year Anniversary Fruit Tour

On Saturday, **October 6th**, we will gather at 6:30 AM at the Bear Creek Extension Facility to board our free, air-conditioned and comfortable bus, with departure time at 7:00 AM for our trip to the Bella Vista Ranch, in Wimberley, Texas (**Website www.bvranch.com**). Driving time is about 3 hours, but we plan to stop midway for group bathroom breaks, etc. Bring something to read, enjoy the scenery, and we may try to give some impromptu lectures on a portable microphone along the way. Bella Vista is the first successful olive orchard in Texas (*Some of you may remember that Texas A&M Professor George Ray McEachen has always taught that Texas' climate is a graveyard for olive cultivation. This operation, which houses the Texas Olive Oil Company, www.texasoliveoil.com, disputes that allegation*). The Houston Chronicle recently ran an article indicating that another major olive orchard for Texas is in the active planning stage. We will have sit down and served lunch at the Bella Vista Ranch, directly from their cookbook, and a tour and wine tasting there. This facility also grows apples, maintains a pick your own blackberry operation, and has plantings of Asian persimmons, grapes and some citrus along with extensive vegetable gardens. Bring your cameras. The tour, lunch and wine tasting will last 1.5 hours (about 11:30 AM to 2:45 PM), and then we will return to Houston, so this is really an all-day event. Although the transportation is free, the tour and luncheon fee is \$38.00 per person. If you wish to participate, please make your reservation promptly with checks made out to Harris County Master Gardeners Association, and mail them with the completed form to Yvonne Gibbs, Harris County Extension Offices, 3033 Bear Creek Dr., Houston, TX 77084-4233. **It is first come, first served, and so please date your forms. If you are a couple, we must have both names – this is a requirement for the bus services.**

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____

NAME AND PHONE NUMBER OF EMERGENCY CONTACT PERSON:

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____

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

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

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