



RFCI

June 2021

TAMPA BAY CHAPTER of the
RARE FRUIT COUNCIL INTERNATIONAL,
INC.

<http://www.rarefruit.org>

Tampa.Bay.RFCI@gmail.com

<http://www.facebook.com/TampaBayChapterRareFruitCouncilIntlInc>

Meetings are held the second Sunday, 2:00 P.M.
at the American Legion Post 111,
6918 N. Florida Ave, Tampa 33604

∞ Upcoming Programs and Events ∞

June 13th – 2pm. Learning from Mango Men Homestead: A new mango reality. In person meeting! With current Covid guidelines indicating we can hold meetings in person, we will resume our first meeting in June, discussing



mangoes. Ian Campbell will be providing his perspective on mangoes. His talk will deal with all aspects of their orchard, planting, managing, watering, fertilizing, pruning, etc. and also discuss how varieties are selected that are their best performers.

Please read additional information about the meeting on page 2.

∞ Welcome New Members ∞

Amanda Cummins
Annie Traynor

St Petersburg
Wesley Chapel



In Memoriam



Stacey Blethen – member since 2015

President: Fred Engelbrecht; Vice Presidents: Cora Coronel and Kenny Gil; Secretary: Jager Mitchell;
Treasurer: Susan McAveety; Newsletter/Membership: Denise Provencher

Additional meeting information:

Before the meeting begins 12:00 – 12:30 Members are needed to arrive early to help set up the room for the meeting, and to stay a little later after the meeting to help clean up. Please consider helping out before or after the meeting if you can.
12:00 - 1:30 We would also like to have the Club's farmer's market before the meeting starts – where members can bring in their extra fruit bounty to sell, or to sell their plants.

At the meeting:

2:00pm The speaker will take the floor.

The Club will provide food – probably pizza or sandwiches – but if you wish to bring something, that is fine too.

There will also be the usual plant raffle, so if you have extra plants from your garden, bring them on in to share with other members.

Note: Per current Covid regulations, there are no mask or social distancing requirements. Please do what makes you comfortable. Wear a mask if you prefer, many of us will be!

After the meeting at 4pm, there will be a special board meeting. The Club is looking for members who have been members for at least one year, that would be interested in serving on the Board. This is a great opportunity to help with different Club projects and committees, and to help make decisions and share your new ideas. **If you are interested, please stay after the general meeting and attend this special Board meeting at 4pm. Voting in the new Board members will be conducted at the July meeting, so make you sure you attend this June meeting to be considered as a Board member.**



July 11th – The long-awaited annual Fruit Tasting!

We missed having this favorite annual event last year, and cannot wait to enjoy it once again! There will be an open question and answer forum with our Club experts to answer all those fruity questions you have been wanting answers to for the past year. So, get those questions ready and bring them with you!

First Prize for the Club's State Fair Exhibit Photos by Tom Schaefer



George Campani stands in front of the Club's fruit display at the State Fair.

Due to the pandemic, the Rare Fruit Club's Citrus Celebration was not a part of the Florida State Fair this year. However, the Club did continue its' tradition of having a Display in the Florida State Fair.

The 10-foot by 10-foot Display was assembled and manned by members Paul Branesky, Jerry Amyot, Scott Peterson, and George Campani. The Display showed the many fruits and fruit trees grown in our area. For the fairgoers, there were informational hand-outs supplied by the Citrus Research and Education Center. This information is also beneficial to our Club members. While manning our Display we promoted our Clubs' interest in growing fruit. All this while winning the People's Choice Award for Horticulture Display.

A special thanks to: member Chris Ramirez for lending the club four mango trees for our display, member Jerry Amyot for lending his Wampee Tree for our display and mentioning that it was in the citrus family, and Jene's Tropicals for lending the blueberry plants for our display. A special thanks to Paul Branesky, Committee Chair, for his hard work in coordinating the Display.

Our continued participation in the Florida State Fair can only be continued with members volunteering their time and energy. Thank you everyone.

George Campani



George ‘horsing’ around a bit.



Paul Branesky (L) and George Campani (R)

☞ What’s Happening ☞

by Paul Zmoda

I knew we would suffer a bad drought sooner or later. We had been pretty lucky with adequate rainfall for the past few years but our luck seems to have run out this year. I’m glad we have a dependable well.

I did some more grafting earlier in April – several persimmons, including a Texas Black, which took readily onto native American persimmon rootstock. I was sure this combination would work and it did. I also grafted a half dozen Blanc Du Bois grape scions onto Il Primo rootstock and placed them into vermiculite to root after the procedure. Choosing the Il Primo allows us to plant in wet soils where most own-root grapes would fail.



I planted three clones of a grape new to me: ‘Victoria Red’. This table grape, bred in Arkansas, has individual grapes the size of fifty cent pieces and is resistant to Pierce’s Disease.

May means blackberries are in season here at Flatwoods Fruit Farm, and we are enjoying them daily while they last. The variety we grow is ‘Brazos’, and they are pretty big this year. See photo left by Paul Zmoda.

Interesting Apple Stories

Photography professor researches Japanese method of raising apples

by Deborah Rieselman

Photography by Jane Alden Stevens

When a single Japanese apple costs as much as \$150, the fruit isn't shoved into one's mouth for a juicy chomp. Instead, each apple gets placed in an elaborate box to be presented as a gift. When served, the apple is delicately sliced and served on plates, but only after everyone has admired the artwork sunburned into the fruit's perfect peel.

Admittedly, only the best apples receive such artistic adornment and inflated price tags, yet selling apples for the equivalent of \$10 each is not unusual in Japan, according to fine-art photography professor Jane Stevens. "No one tosses one of these into a lunch box," she jokes. And no grocer sells them by the bag, either. For nearly 200 years, Japanese farmers have fine-tuned the little-known craft of creating gourmet apples. To document their "incredibly labor-intensive efforts," Stevens spent four months in Japan last year photographing how the Japanese cultivate enormous apples with utterly unblemished skins and perfectly tinted on all sides.



"It's a totally different way of raising apples," says the professor from the College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning. "From the first bloom until harvest, many farmers will have touched an apple 10 to 12 times, compared to our farmers touching an apple only once or twice, and that's at harvest time."

The work starts in the spring when farmers thin the apple blossoms. "An average tree has 4,000 blossoms, and they cull them down to 200 to 400," she says.

Each flower consists of a set of five blossoms -- one in the center, surrounded by four more, she explains. Farmers climb ladders to carefully pluck the four outer blooms, leaving only the center one. This creates fruit that is 30 percent larger than American apples, the standard size expected in Japan, she notes. In June, while apples are still less than an inch in diameter, imperfect fruit is discarded, and the best apples are identified as ones to "bag." Farmers go back up the ladders, armed with distinctive bags made of a special opaque paper and lined with a translucent, colored wax paper, she describes. They pull a bag over each apple, pleat it in way to allow room for growth, then wire it shut so the apple receives no sunlight for three months or more. The technique keeps out pests, significantly extends the storage life and flavor of the fruit, and leaves apples a creamy white color. In the fall, farmers again climb the ladders to carefully remove the outer bag without tearing the lining.

"The color of the wax paper -- red, green, light blue, dark blue -- triggers the color genes of the apple and affects the fruit's ultimate color," Stevens says. "The wax bags remain on the apples for two to 10 days, depending upon the color of the wax."

When the wax bags are finally removed, farmers take exorbitant steps to increase an apple's exposure to the sun, thereby increasing its sugar content and giving each a uniform color. They trim branches and strip leaves from remaining branches to keep shadows off the fruit. Next, they lay silver or white mats on the ground to reflect sunlight on the bottom of the fruit. Every few weeks, they also hand-turn each piece to give all sides equal sun exposure.

Turning apples is tricky. "If there isn't a branch to rest the apple against to keep it in place, a rubber band is placed around the stem and looped around another branch to keep the apple facing toward the sun," Stevens says. "They turn the apples two or three times so all the sides match."



For the biggest, most perfect apples, they also apply sticker-like stencils to create designs on the apples' skin. "The stencils act like a high-contrast negative," the professor notes. "Some have sayings on them, such as, 'Best wishes for a long life.' Some are negatives with pictures. One Japanese pop star put his picture on apples to give his entourage for presents."

Stevens learned of the Japanese cultivation skills years ago, then conducted enough research in the states to warrant her trip to the Tsugaru region of Aomori prefecture, one of Japan's prime apple-growing regions. Regardless of her prior research, she still stood in awe of the work she witnessed in person.

"They go up and down ladders all the time," she says.

"Occasionally, I saw a hydraulic lift, but usually they use ladders. I was in a state of disbelief.

"This intensive work results in apples that are absolutely beautiful and flawless. Our apples look scruffy in comparison."

An apple's size and appearance constitute the biggest factor in Japanese consumer preferences, experts told her. Nevertheless, "The apples were uniformly delicious," she enthusiastically reports. "I probably tasted at least a dozen different varieties, and they were all great, even out of season."

Developed in the 19th century, apple bagging is applied to about 30 percent of the crop, but 15 years ago, it affected 70 percent, she says. "Farmers do it themselves, but their children aren't following in their footsteps, and there aren't enough laborers to do the work."

Realizing the technique may one day disappear, she is proud to document it for posterity. But she was also shocked to discover she may be the first artist who has ever done so.

"I haven't yet found a painter, sculptor or photographer who has ever reproduced this," she says.

"Even all the translators I worked with were blown away when they learned about this. They had never wondered about the bags before."

In many respects, Stevens feels as if she is preserving what could be a dying art form. "Yet the Japanese don't see it as art," she concedes. "They are simply creating the product that Japanese consumers demand. Japanese farmers can't afford not to raise a perfect apple."

Black apples Tibet, Arkansas THEY ARE HEIRLOOM APPLES



During the 1800s, many Arkansas families had kitchen orchards with apple trees on their land. By the end of the 19th century, two of the largest apple-producing counties in the United States were Benton and Washington counties in **Arkansas**. In 1900, Benton County was home to around 40,000 acres of commercial apple production, and 15-20 percent of those apples were from the Arkansas Black apple tree.

A moth infestation and bacterial blight, along with the climate and economic pressures of the **Great Depression**, virtually killed commercial production of the Arkansas Black. Today, there are fewer than 150 apple growers in the state, primarily with small orchards that sell to farmers markets and farm stands, and the Arkansas Black makes up less than five percent of the apples grown in the state.

But here's the thing about the Arkansas Black apple: You can't eat it right off the tree. Right after picking, it's hard and sour-tasting. But if you let it sit in cold storage (that is, your refrigerator) it ripens into something amazing.

The thick skin of the deep red apple helps preserve it during storage. It needs to sit for at least a couple of months, but the apples will keep for at least three or four months.

Once it sits in the cold for a bit, the tart apple takes on a sweet flavor with a taste of vanilla and warm spice like cinnamon. It's a bit like wine; let the apple age and the flavor develops into something exceptional.

Because of its firm texture, the Arkansas Black holds its shape well in apple pies or in desserts where you want a whole apple. You should also try it as part of a **cheese** plate or pair it with meat. It makes an excellent hard cider, too.

∞ Club Notes ∞

Contributing to the newsletter is a great way to share what you are doing in your garden with other members, learn what other members are growing, and get your questions answered.

Your submissions for the newsletter, pictures, notes of interest, events, tips, recipes, questions, etc. are especially needed - please send them to bdprovencher@tampabay.rr.com

Submissions for the next newsletter due by: **June 22nd**.

∞ Membership information ∞

NEW MEMBERS

Download and fill out a membership application from: <https://rarefruit.org/membership/>, and send with check or money order for \$20 made out to Tampa Bay RFCI to:
Tampa Bay RFCI, 12722 Prosser Rd., Dade City, FL 33525

RENEWING MEMBERS

Send check or money order for \$20 made out to Tampa Bay RFCI and mail to:
Tampa Bay RFCI, 12722 Prosser Rd., Dade City, FL 33525



The objectives of The Tampa Bay Rare Fruit Council International:

To inform the public about the merits and uses of fruits common to this region and encourages the cultivation, collection, propagation and growth of fruits that are exotic or unusual to west central Florida. The club also encourages the development of new fruit varieties, cooperating with local and foreign agricultural agencies.

Tampa Bay RFCI
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