

Autumn

September 2003

# ALASKA PIONEER FRUIT GROWERS NEWSLETTER

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## Association News

Our Treasurer, Alice Brewer, reported that we have \$5857.31 in funds available as of July 10, 2003. Thank you, Alice, for keeping us posted at every meeting!

Please note that we have an orchard tour on Thursday, August 14<sup>th</sup> at 7 PM. I have included a page with our meeting schedule through the rest of the year, so mark your calendars now.

As you can see, this newsletter is a little on the scanty side. Please send me your articles, thoughts, recipes, orchard reports - anything! If you tried growing, or even just tasted one new fruit this year, let me know

how it went - members want to know. Our next newsletter will be published at the end of September or beginning of October.

Two Board members will be retiring for sure this year, and our club cannot exist as such without a full contingent of Board members. Please start thinking now about what you can do for your club. The President organizes the meeting topics, mails out reminder cards, and is the point of contact for the club. The Newsletter Editor puts together member submitted articles 3 to 4 times a year, publishes them, and mails them out.

## The Editor's Garden

*By Tami Schlies*

Greetings from the Editor's Garden! Our heat wave this summer has been great to many of my plants, and I wish I'd planted more beans and corn. As they say, it is either a bean year or a lean year, and this is definitely a bean year! My potatoes are suffering from what I believe is a virus of some sort, since it does not fit any other description. I purchased seed potatoes from Burgess and should have know better than to plant them based on how they

looked when I received them. I got a very small yield, but the plants are already completely dead. I am most excited to see how my jicama plant produces (maybe you'll see it at the fair) and my Jerusalem artichokes, both new attempts at growing this year.

On to fruits - I have found MANY rusty tussock moths larva munching my apple trees this summer. These are fuzzy

caterpillars with plumes of black hairs both front and rear, numerous orange-red spots on the body, and four clumps of buff hair on the mid back. These are supposed to be controllable by hand picking, or possibly with Bt. Hopefully we will have a normal winter this year and keep the populations down.

The winter also had a negative effect on several of my rootstocks. I lost every *Malus prunifolia*, and a few of my trees on both *ranetka* and *bacatta* have languished as the summer progressed. Two out of three died slowly, and I still can't tell if the one that is left will survive. All my Evans cherries, my opal plums, and my several Manchurian plums survived the winter well. I lost all but 6 of my Ozark Beauty strawberries (out of 50 or so), but my inheritance of unknown variety, over the fence strawberries are

healthy and well. The 'Strazzberries' I ordered from Burgess produced this year, but I will be removing them, as they are of less than mediocre flavor (nothing at all like a strawberry / raspberry cross).

I was very impressed with the overall quality of plants I received from Northwoods Nursery, and would like to order again this year, if anyone else is interested. The only difficulty I had was with the Scarlet Surprise apple, which failed to take off until I cut it way back and moved the pots to the greenhouse. I have 18 or so inches of growth on them now. Everything else was wonderful, flowering and even fruiting this first year, though many were in pots far too small and neglected for much of the summer. (All right, all right, some are STILL neglected, but I will get around to them)

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## Did You Know?

- If you discover a girdled tree in early spring, use white silicone caulking on the exposed area to prevent desiccation and save the tree. The bark may grow back.
- Young apple trees do best in bare soil with no competing grass or weeds and no mulch.
- Evans cherry trees do best with neglect and competition from grass and weeds.
- Ordinary shredded office paper is the best mulch for earthworm activity.
- In Canada they use a pre-emergent herbicide called "Caseron" in November to keep all weeds and grass from coming up around the Saskatoon bushes.
- Apples do not need to be picked until the temperatures get down to about 25 degrees.
- Roses and apples can suffer what is called "replant disorder" if a new plant is placed where a related plant was recently removed. Microorganisms in the soil form symbiosis with the previous plant which can negatively effect the new plant, making it fail to thrive.

# New Fruit Variety Trials

By Tami Schlies

Our visit from Bernie Nikolai this summer was very enlightening on a lot of fronts. He is from Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, which has weather most like our state, though a bit colder winters and hotter summers than Anchorage. Their average frost dates are around May 24<sup>th</sup> and September 15<sup>th</sup>. They only get about 18 inches of rain a year, mostly June through August. Moose, deer, dogs, mice, voles, and porcupines are main destroyers of trees in Edmonton, and growers also deal with regular sunscald. The only major difference is that they have great soil with very few rocks.

Bernie has about 200 apple trees, 30 pear trees, and a few cherry trees in his orchard. He is testing many new varieties out of Canada's breeding program that have not yet been released for sale. Bernie and several other members of APFG are currently testing an apple variety called "Prairie Sun", due to be released at the end of August, so keep your eye out for it. It is a "Goodland" cross that is supposed to be a good cooking apple and okay fresh. Also look for an apple with a name like "Saskatchewan Sweet Sunation" to be released this year (the name is yet undecided). It produces yellow fruit with a bright red blush, and is supposed to be firm, rich, and tangy with excellent storability. Bernie says it has excellent taste, is extremely hardy, is excellent for cooking, and is ripe around Sept. 18 to Sept. 21 for him - a good 3 to 4 weeks after Parkland, so maybe too late for us. He says Clair Lammers is ripening his first few this year, so we hope to hear from him about ripening time in central Alaska.

We learned a lot about rootstocks during Bernie's visit. Apparently, Siberia is the only place similar enough to our climate and Edmonton's to get satisfactory rootstock

varieties. Bernie asserts that the best rootstock for Edmonton is ranetka, which is a Siberian crab cross (anything crossed with a Siberian crab - *Malus baccata* - is a ranetka). In my experience this is the best rootstock for our climate as well. Straight *Malus baccata* rootstock has compatibility problems with some grafts, and other rootstocks I have tried die out completely or do not express very much vigor in our climate.

Ottawa 3 is a rootstock out of Canada that is hardy, but, according to Bernie, it "pouts" after being transplanted. It may take more than three years to recover after moving it. Some growers apparently plant the rootstocks in place at 6 inches tall and then graft on to them when they have grown a little. Other rootstocks which may be hardy have other factors that make them less desirable than ranetka. P-22 rootstock is very susceptible to fireblight. Bud 9 needs snow cover. Bud 490 and Bud 118 are clonal rootstocks with purple leaves that seem to be hardy so far, but are semi-dwarf, which can be detrimental in our cool, slow growing climate.

Bernie encouraged us to plant our own seeds and develop our own varieties that will be hardy up here, not only for rootstock, but for apple production. Take seeds from locally grown apples, rinse and dry them overnight, then plant them in the ground about 2 feet apart in September and wait. About half will be biannual or dwarfing or prone to fireblight etc., but 50% to 70% will turn out to be a good apple - at least as good as the parent. Production only takes about 5 to 8 years, so if you have the time and the space, plant a few!

Pears are much more difficult to breed than apples to encourage both hardiness and

quality. Right now in our climate we can pretty much only grow usurian pear varieties, which are not that great tasting. Bernie is working on getting some pear varieties out of Siberia that are supposedly as good as the pears sold in stores, and, of course, are hardy in our climate. With the current political situation in the former Soviet Union, however, tracking down these lesser known varieties is nearly impossible, let alone getting any out of the country. Clair Lammers offered lots of Siberian Pear seeds for planting this fall, which, if they are planted out in the field this fall, should be big enough for grafting in a couple of years, about the time the scionwood will hopefully be available. It would be a shame to graft hardy Russian pears on other pear rootstock, only to have the tree die because the roots weren't hardy in a test winter. Siberian pear takes -50F with no damage, and seems fully compatible with the Russian varieties, as they have Siberian Pear in the ancestry, which gives them the hardiness. So unless we find a source for Siberian pear seedlings for grafting, we will need to grow our own.

- Krazulya (Beauty) is the best early Russian pear, ripe in mid to late August. It is mid sized (up to 110 grams), yellow, with a dark red hint. Best of the early pears, the flavor is very rich and sweet and a little spicy. It was rated at 4.7 out of 5.0 and keeps 10 days.
- L Krasnobkaya (Red Skinned) is the best late variety, but is tart until stored for several weeks, according to the records. It is pear shaped, yellow green with a red tint, and received a rating of 4.9 on a scale of 5.0. It can easily withstand 50 below. The fruit is harvested in late September in Siberia, is up to 180 grams in weight, and keeps until the new-year, improving with storage (the flesh is yellow and harsh at

harvest). Clair Lammers has 3 Krasnobokaya trees growing in Fairbanks, but it may be too late ripening for many of us.

- Severyanka is the most well known variety in Siberia. It is a little susceptible to tip damage in very severe winters, but repairs itself very quickly, producing fruit at only 4 to 5 years old. Fruits can get as large as 160 grams, ripen one week after Krazulya, and are white fleshed and sweet, rating 4 out of 5 points.
- Skazochnaya (Fairy or Fantasy) is another recommended variety, producing ideally pear shaped fruit that is quite large, averaging 180 to 250 grams. The flesh is tender, juicy, sweet, and spicy, receiving a rating of 4.6 out of 5.0. It ripens at the end of August or beginning of September and keeps for a month.
- Larinskaya is a large, heavy bearing tree, ripens in early September, and produces large fruit (200 grams). The fruit is truly pear shaped, juicy and tart-sweet, rating 4.5 out of 5.0 points, and keeps for up to 2 months.
- L Vekovaya (Secular) is another large fruited variety (280 grams) with white, very juicy, tart-sweet flesh rating 4.6, an excellent desert pear. It ripens the end of September and stores 1 to 3 months.
- L Decabrinka produces dark red fruit with light red hints, averaging about 100 grams. This is one of the best keepers, storing for 3 plus months.
- Ragugnaya (Rainbow) begins to produce at 4 years old and increases quickly. Fruit is big (up to 140 grams) ripen in the third week of August, and keep for ten days. The flesh is juicy and

sweet, rating 4.5 out of 5.0 points. One of the best late summer cultivars.

Cherries are another area of breeding interest to Bernie, and he is also testing several varieties of self fertile sour cherries that are nearly as sweet as sweet cherries and can take temperatures down to 45 below zero. Most of these varieties are quite short, averaging less than 2.5 meters in height, compared to Evans cherry or Montmorency which can reach almost 4 meters. Brix content, of course, tells us how sweet the fruit is, and the sweetest of these (7-21-16.3) has been nicknamed "Sweetie Pie". The largest (7-32-19.1) has been nicknamed "Big Momma".

I have included some charts of these trial cherries. Fruit size can vary by 0.5 grams from year to year, so the charts are an average. (Montmorency is not hardy in Saskatoon, so the numbers here are based on literature and observations in Ontario and B.C.) Kevin Irvin and Clair Lammers are trying to get a large order of these cherries in from DNA Gardens this fall or spring, as they should be virus indexed. I will try to keep interested members posted.

Thanks again to Bernie for visiting us and sharing his knowledge.

### New University of Saskatchewan Dwarf Sour Cherries being tested in 2003

Variety	vigour	suckering	harvest
Evans	extreme	many	late Aug
Montmorency	extreme	?	n/a
SK Carmine Jewel	moderate	slight	late July / early Aug
SK 7-7-5.8	moderate	moderate	late Aug / early Sept
SK 7-19-27.6	very	moderate	early / mid Aug
SK 7-21-16.3	slight	rare	early / mid Aug
SK 7-21-31.0	moderate	moderate	early mid Aug
SK 7-32-19.1	slight	slight	late Aug / early Sept

Variety	Skin color	Flesh color	Juice color	Pit shape	Fruit wt	Pit wt	Brix
Evans	Bright red	Yellow/pink	Brown/pink	elongated	5.0 g	0.22 g	13
Montmorency	Bright red	Yellow/pink	Brown/pink	round	4.5 g	0.25 g	12
SK Carmine Jewel	Black/dk red	Red	Bright red	round	3.5 g	0.15 g	17
SK 7-7-5.8	Black/dk red	Red	Bright red	round	4.0 g	0.20 g	22
SK 7-19-27.6	Med red	Light red	Light red	round	4.5 g	0.25 g	15
SK 7-21-16.3	Black/dk red	Red	Bright red	round	6.0 g	0.28 g	22
SK 7-21-31.0	Black/dk red	Red	Bright red	round	5.0 g	0.25 g	20
SK 7-32-19.1	Black/dk red	Red	Bright red	elongated	6.5 g	0.35 g	19

## Mark Your Calendar

*August 14<sup>th</sup>* At 7 PM Tour at Doug Tryck's Nursery. 3625 Rabbit Creek Road, Anchorage. Take the Seward Highway to Rabbit Creek Road and turn left. Go about 0.8 of a mile (about ½ mile past Lawrence Clark's) and turn left. Limited parking, so car-pool if possible and park at the church about a block before Doug's on the left. If you would like, bring a snack or beverage to share, and we can use Doug's picnic tables.

*September 11<sup>th</sup>* Cider Pressing at 7 PM at Dan Elliot's in Wasilla. Dan's Coreel Cider Press will be available to grind and press any early ripe apples you want to make into cider. Bring your own apples and juice containers. (Heyer 12 is better suited processed and frozen for pies and sauce than for cider.) Mile 4.85 Fairview Loop Rd. - 2<sup>nd</sup> left after Rod & Patty on the corner (1<sup>st</sup> driveway before Jackson Court). 376-5196

*September 25<sup>th</sup>* Annual Apple Tasting at Dwight Bradley's in Peter's Creek. No earlier than 6 PM, please. Come tour his orchard, then taste locally grown apples and other fruit at 7 PM. Bring your fruit to share, either plain or used in a recipe (bring the recipe too, for the newsletter!) From Anchorage take the Glenn Highway to the 1<sup>st</sup> Peter's Creek exit, go back under the bridge (west) to a 4 way stop. Continue through the intersection on Voyles to a T intersection - the driveway right in front of you across the T is Dwight's.

*October 9<sup>th</sup>* We resume our regular monthly meetings at 7 PM on every 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday at Boyer Photography Studio in Anchorage (behind Mat-Maid Dairy off Northern Lights). We will watch a 20 minute video on top-working fruit trees and then spend time discussing our year of growing successes and failures.

*November 13<sup>th</sup>* Annual Elections at 7 PM, Boyer Photography. We will need a new newsletter editor and a new president, so think about volunteering your skills now. Also, we will be discussing what we want to order as a club for next spring, so bring your wish list.

*December 11<sup>th</sup>* To Be Announced.

*January 8<sup>th</sup>* To Be Announced.

*January 28<sup>th</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup>* The APFG is co-sponsoring Bob Bors of the University of Saskatchewan at the annual Greenhouse and Growers Conference in Anchorage. Bob is head of the domestic fruit development program at U. of S. This is a great opportunity to learn about cold hardy fruit breeding and the newest cultivars being developed.

## Featured Fruit

### Wild Alaskan Blueberry

*Vaccinium ovalifolium, V. alaskensis, V. uliginosum*

Our wild blueberries here in Alaska tend to be much more flavorful than the commercial blueberries bought at the grocery store. They grow in such abundance that many find no need to attempt the very specific conditions required for growing blueberry cultivars in their back yards. Instead we troop out to the mountainsides with buckets in hand, hoping this is not the year someone else found our favorite spot first. Blueberry bushes can be 6 ½ feet tall or a mere 12 inches. They often have reddish stems, pink, urn shaped flowers, and ripen fruit in mid to late July through August.

### Wild Blueberry Oatcakes

1 c. oat flour	dash of cinnamon
¼ c. all purpose flour	1 egg
2 t. baking powder	1 c. milk
2 T. sugar	2 T. melted butter
¼ t. salt	1 c. blueberries, fresh or frozen

If you do not have oat flour, you can grind quick cook oats in a blender or food processor to make flour - a finer grind is better. Mix all dry ingredients together. Add milk and egg. Whisk together until combined. Add melted butter and mix until combined. Fold in blueberries. Cook on a medium hot griddle (375) until bubbles form. Flip, finish cooking, and serve with syrup or honey.

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Orchard Tour August 14<sup>th</sup>! See inside for details