

ALASKA NAFEX NEWSLETTER

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MEETING DATES

Feb. 11 Thurs. 7 p.m. NBA lunchroom Plant genetics. Debbie Brown, Speaker.

Mar. 10 . Thurs. 7 p.m. NBA lunchroom All about rhubarb. Cathy Wright, speaker.

April 14. Thurs. 7 p.m. NBA lunchroom Grafting workshop. Speaker T.B.A.

Late April. (On a Saturday) Pruning work party.

May 12. Thurs. 7 p.m. NBA lunchroom Planting and care of young fruit trees. Rich Raynor, speaker.

June 9. Thurs. 7 p.m. NBA lunchroom. Pie cherries: varieties, characteristics, culture. Erik Simpson, speaker.

If enough people are interested, an orchard tour in late August or Sept, 1988 is possible, as well as another spring fruit walk.

JANUARY MEETING SUMMARY

Twenty people turned out for the Jan 14 meeting of the Alaska NAFEX chapter, including 4 new members: Dwight and Lauren Bradley, Art Eash and Peggy McKaig. Debbie Brown presented material and led a discussion on selection and care of cane, vine and bush fruits and their use in landscaping.

Debbie began by discussing the best way to prune gooseberries. If a bush was planted in May 1987, it should be pruned to 6 main canes in April 1988 (if 6 canes were produced). In April 1989, the '88 growth of new canes should be pruned back to 3 canes, and in April 1990, the 1989 canes should have 3 new ones left, and 3 of the 1987 canes should be pruned.

Bob Purvis mentioned a new red currant introduction by Southmeadow Fruit Gardens, 'Jonckheere van Tets'. This currant ripens somewhat earlier than 'Red Lake', is larger, and produces fruit sweet enough to eat fresh. It costs \$7.50 per bush plus shipping. 'Holland Long Bunch' is available from Dinkel's Fairview Nursery in Wasilla and has done well in Fairbanks. 'Minnesota 71', a good performer at the Plant Materials Center in Palmer and at Fairbanks, is sold by the New York State Fruit Testing Cooperative.

Cathy Wright reported that the white currants at the PMC actually did better than the red ones and said Doug Tryck's nursery has some good cultivars available. Of the black currants, Cathy considers 'Boskoop Giant' to be hardier and not as musky-flavored as the 'Black Magnus'.

Among red raspberries, 'Boyne' is popular in Canada. Betty Eberhardt of Chugiak has a U-pick which features 'Boyne'. Sutton's Nursery on Tudor Road in Anchorage sells 'Boyne' which is reported to be vigorous and bears large, sweet fruit. 'Reveille' is another red raspberry which does well at the PMC. Bush's Bunches sells it.

Among the golden raspberries, 'Golden Ember' is available from Tryck's and from Bush's Landscaping. 'Fallgold' seems moderately hardy; 'Honeyqueen', a bit less so at the PMC. Ed Swanson pointed out that a raspberry that produces good fruit in one location may not do as well in another microclimate and soil regime.

Commercial nurseries propagate raspberries by root sections possessing at least 2 nodes per section. Debbie mentioned that raspberry seeds need light to germinate. After being buried in soil they may not germinate for 150 years or more until they are exposed to light by some disturbance. That is why they do best in open areas disturbed by people, moose, etc. Both blueberries and raspberries grow very well in burn areas.

Bob Purvis pointed out from his own experience that there needs to be a balance between old and new canes on the raspberry bush. Too many of the former can sap the bush's energy and result in poor primocane production. Too many of the latter can shade the fruiting canes and result in many spindly primocanes rather than a few big ones, so prune to allow only 6 or less of each.

For all small fruits, light availability is a limiting factor. Lastly, if you plant raspberry bushes on your property line, make sure first that your neighbor likes raspberries, because they will spread!

-R. Purvis

DAY NEUTRALS- WHAT ARE THEY?
(EXCERPTED FROM Fruit Facts. Alberta Special Crops and Horticultural Research Center. Brooks, Alberta. Bull 88-2).

Day neutral strawberries were first released in 1979. 'Hecker', 'Aptos' and 'Brighton' were first released from the Univ. of Calif, and additional varieties have followed from MD, CA, and WA. Day neutrals were developed by crossing and back crossing standard Junebearing types with a wild everbearing strawberry from the mountains of Utah.

Strawberries are classified into 3 main types: Junebearers, everbearers and day-neutrals. Classifications are based on the production season of the types, and the time of flower bud initiation. Flower buds of Junebearers (such as 'Alaska Pioneer' and 'Toklat') are initiated under short days (fall) and they fruit the following summer. Everbearers initiate fruit buds under short days and long days, thus having 2 fruit seasons each year. Flower buds are initiated under all day lengths in day neutrals.

Junebearing varieties flower, fruit and then runner in that order. Day neutral types flower, fruit and runner all at the same time. If allowed to runner, these runner plants can flower and fruit without rooting.

Under very warm summer temperatures flower initiation may be inhibited. If plants are moisture-stressed under hot, dry conditions berry size will drop dramatically.

Some producers have had limited success in overwintering day neutrals, but most consider them an annual crop. This has the advantage for weed control purposes, in that strawberries can be planted on summerfallowed land each year.

To obtain the maximum production benefits that day neutrals can provide, very extensive management practices should be followed:

- plant only into summerfallowed soil
- soil nutrients should be optimal
- a good moist seedbed should be prepared
- plant as early as possible in spring using polyethylene mulch
- plant should never be allowed to dry out
- irrigation is a must
- plants should be continually de-runnered
- weeds should be controlled continually
- some producers have found direct production responses to regular (monthly) applications of nitrogen.

Day neutrals provide fruit growers with an opportunity to extend the picking season for strawberries. If grown properly, they can yield 2-3 times the lb/acre as normal Junebearing types because of their extended season.

PLANT SPACINGS FOR SASKATOON
(Information from Fruit Facts Bull 88-2. Alberta Special Crops & Horticultural Research Center, Brooks, Alberta).

Saskatoons are becoming a significant fruit crop in Alberta, especially since new methods of mechanical harvesting are being used. Some innovative growers have modified mechanical black currant and blueberry harvesters to work on saskatoons, and this has increased yields due to more plants per acre. The recommended spacing for saskatoons is now:

hand harvesting- rows 12 feet apart and plants 6 feet apart in rows for 605 plants per acre

mechanical harvesting- 15-16 ft between rows and 3-4 feet between plants in rows. This provides for 681- 968 plants per acre depending on the row and plant spacing chosen. The row spacings are wider than hand harvested rows to facilitate the machine harvesting, but the between plant spacing are reduced significantly. Plants are no longer grown as single entities, but form a continuous hedgerow. These rows are irrigated using some kind of trickle irrigation system to further enhance yields.

For Alaskans who want to try a few saskatoons (seviceberries), they are gorgeous ornamental shrubs as well as a bush fruit. Try the cultivars, 'Smoky', 'Pembina', 'Northline' or 'Regent' for starters.

-PSH

NEWS FROM WRANGELL

Christina Florschutz writes that there are many old fruit trees growing in Wrangell, but the identities of most of the trees are unknown. One 'Van' sweet cherry has borne fruit for 7 years and seems to be thriving in Wrangell. Christina, herself, has a few trees all planted in the last 2 years. They include 'Butler' and 'Ennis' filberts, 'Mutsu' apple, 'Ashmead's Kernel' apple, 'Gravenstein' apple, 'Bramley' apple, 'Sam' sweet cherry, 'Angela' sweet cherry, a mulberry, and an American persimmon. All are thriving except the persimmon which died of unknown causes. All plants were bought from Raintree Nursery.

Christina is looking for information on the number of heat units a variety needs to ripen fruit. She mentions that Wrangell accumulates only about 1000 heat units per season. A list of known heat units for different varieties could save lots of time and money in experimentation. Any NAFEX member who knows of such a list should send it in to the Editor or Bob Purvis (addresses on front) so we can share it with Christina and other NAFEX members.

MORE NEWS FROM WRANGELL

Below is an excerpt from a letter written by Paula Rak, a Master Gardener in Wrangell.

"I thought that you might be interested in my observations on fruit growing in Wrangell. Horse chestnuts do very well here. There are 2 very large trees on Case Avenue that fruit profusely every year. One owner raked up her lawn one year and put the debris along her foundation. She found some horse chestnuts had sprouted over the winter. I now have one of those seedlings in my yard. An adjacent property owner has 2 plum trees (large size trees) which produce very well most years. In '86 she allowed me to try air layer cuttings from it. They did not take. In '87, Jill [Thayer, Cooperative Extension Service] and I tried to get her to tell us the variety. Reluctantly, she called the "good" one a Hollywood variety. The closest that I can come to this in my catalogues is a "Burbank". Any ideas? It has a blue-red color. Do you have an identification key for fruit trees? This is the one that has good tasting fruit. The other tree also has loads of plums, but rather sour. In '86, she wanted to cut down the tree with the sour fruit. I tried to explain about cross pollination, but she

apparently didn't understand because in '87 she was still talking about cutting it down. Also, the good tree is being threatened by, we think, a leaking city water pipe that is flooding her yard. It might not be long for this world.

Another property owner in the area has a 10 year old cherry that she says is probably "Bing". It did very well in the 2 years that I saw it.

The Stiking River is just 20 minutes by boat from Wrangell. In '86 we found an old abandoned cabin that had raspberries gone wild. The berries were huge and very sweet. Of course, the soil is naturally sweet, almost neutral.

There are some blackberries growing in several yards in Wrangell, too. One owner described his variety as 'Thornless', I can find 'Thornfree' in my catalogue. He gave me some starts.

Do you know anyone that grows grapes? I am not as interested in the fruit as I am interested in using the leaves for cooking a particular Middle Eastern dish.

-Paula Rak

MORE FRUIT NEWS FROM SOUTHEAST

Bob Henderson from Haines writes that he has some friends in Klukwan who grow blackberries and black raspberries. Both of these fruit crops have failed for Bob because the summers are cooler in Haines. When Bob lived in Petersburg, he grew good raspberries, but at Haines he picks the wild raspberry rather than growing domesticated varieties. The fruit is sweet, but small. He has known several people to try grapes, but they never last more than a couple of years. One of his friends in Klukwan, however, has grapes every year. The vines are grown in a greenhouse that has some heat.

TAKE HEART, ALL YOU DISCOURAGED ALASKA FRUIT GROWERS.....

About 1860, the American journalist and political leader Horace Greeley (1811-1872) was reported to have remarked, "I would not live in Minnesota because you cannot grow apples there." This was bad publicity for a state which was vigorously seeking settlers from eastern states and northern European countries. It reacted as a great challenge to a few stubborn and dedicated would-be fruit growers in Minnesota.

The quest for hardy varieties of apples became a veritable crusade... Greeley's remark cut deep into the pride of Minnesotans and has never been forgotten. Years later, when massive displays of fine apples covered tables at the state fair, they were often marked by signs saying "Horace Greeley said we cannot grow apples".

The University of Minnesota Fruit Breeding Farm near Minneapolis has been responsible for introducing such fruit cultivars as 'Beacon' and

'Haralson' apples, 'Underwood' and 'Superior' plums, the 'Latham' red raspberry, 'Red Lake' and 'Minnesota 71' currants, and 'Oriole', "State Fair" and 'Sweet 16' apples to name just a few.

[Does anyone dare say we cannot grow good apples in Alaska ???]

Excerpted from W.H. Upshall's History of Fruit Growing and Handling in USA and Canada. 1976. p. 82-83. Submitted by R. Purvis.

**THIS IS THE LAST NEWSLETTER
FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVE
NOT PAID YOUR 1988 DUES OF
\$7.00!!!**