

ALASKA NAFEX NEWSLETTER

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MEETING DATES

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.

GRAFTING WORKSHOP IN FAIRBANKS

On Saturday, April 9 starting at 1:30 p.m. , Bob Purvis and Rich Raynor will travel to Fairbanks to conduct a grafting workshop for all interested NAFEX members. The workshop will be held in 301 O'Neill Resources Building on the West Ridge of the UAF campus. If you need directions, please contact Pat Holloway (see address and phone number above).

Bob will bring rootstocks, scionwood and grafting wax. Each participant will be asked to pay for each rootstock and scion used. The tentative price for rootstocks is \$2.00 per stock. Price per scion has not been set. You are also welcome to bring your own plant materials.

Each participant should bring their own grafting knife and sharpener. If you don't have a

grafting knife, a sharp pocket knife will do. Bob Purvis also suggested that a sharp, thin-bladed utility knife (such as Stanley or Great Neck brands available at Pay n' Save) that has replaceable blades will also work. If you have further questions, contact Pat Holloway or Bob Purvis. Please let one of these people know ASAP, if you will be attending this workshop.

CAPTAN ALERT

Captan is a very common fungicide used on strawberries to prevent the development of gray mold disease. This disease is rampant on some cultivars (such as 'Quinalt'), especially during wet, humid weather or under humid storage conditions. It is used mostly by commercial growers. The manufacturers of Captan have issued new label directions for this chemical which requires a 4 day waiting period between spraying and worker's reentry into the field. Also, protective clothing must be worn during mixing and application of the chemical, and the best part of all-- protective gloves must now be worn when harvesting the fruit. Can you imagine wearing gloves to harvest strawberries? Fortunately, research is progressing at the U of Ontario to develop a biological control for gray mold using yeasts or bacteria which inhibit the growth of the mold. So far, preliminary tests look promising.

-PSH

POLLINATION BY ORCHARD BEES

An article in the November 1987 issue of Rodale's Organic Gardening dealt with the subject of orchard bees. Written by a man who both raises and sells them, Gregory Dickman , it offered both information and an invitation to get more from him. I took up the invitation and wrote. Several weeks later a manila envelope containing both an order form and a 12 page color booklet arrived.

Of the several species of orchard bees, one native west of the Rockies seems best for Alaska: Osmia lignaria propinqua Cresson, or lignaria for short. Lignaria does most of its foraging within 100 yards of the nest. Furthermore, this bee prefers fruit tree blossoms to those of other flowers. Both male and female Lignaria gather pollen and nectar on the same trip. The heavy hair concentrations on their heads, thorax and undersides of the abdomen both catch and are used to hold pollen. During good weather they visit about 10 flowers per minute and 22-35 flowers per trip. To provision one cell for an egg requires about 32.5 trips on the average. Pollinating up to 1600 flowers on a good day, they pollinate about 95 - 99% of those, versus about 5% by honeybees.

The bees are not mean and will only sting when pinched. Even then, their sting is only as bad as a mosquito bite to most people. They will nest readily in a pipe filled with coated paper tubes 5/16" in inner diameter.

The life cycle of these bees begins in early spring before fruit trees bloom. Males and females emerge from the nests and mate. After that, they begin making additional nests, collecting pollen and nectar, and the females lay eggs, which hatch in about 1 week. After 4-6 weeks of activity the adults die.

During the summer, the larvae eat the provisions stored in their cells and turn into adults. The new adults go dormant in the nest and will remain dormant throughout the winter as long as temperatures stay below 40°F. Lignaria, according to Dickman, will supposedly survive -30°F with no other protection than its nest.

Dickman describes using a 3" diameter piece of plastic pipe 15" long, filled with coated paper tubes for a nest for the bees.

The main limitation Alaskan growers should be aware of is that if temperatures drop far below zero, the tube should be stored in a refrigerator or other place above 0°F.

The bees cost \$0.13 apiece and are sold in units of 250. A 4-unit kit costs \$25.84. Further information may be obtained for free by writing to Gregory Dickman c/o Orchard Bees, 1111 Cindy St. Auburn, IN 46706. Ph. (219)925-5076.

It should be noted here that the bees do not produce honey for human consumption, which is

one drawback. They would appear to be very good for pollinating early-blooming fruits such as apricots and plums because they can and will fly in cooler temperatures than honeybees.

-R. Purvis

NEWS FROM A BLUEBERRY GROWER

Some time back I set out an experimental planting of lingonberries. I pulled the plants from beds of peatmoss. After about 3 years most of the plants were dead, although it was a very gradual thing. Those plants that survived showed little or no growth.

So I've given up that idea for a moment. In the mean time I've gone ahead and am growing the cultivars (blueberry) from Bailey's nursery in Minnesota.

I placed my first order with a local nursery in the fall of 1984. Those plants arrived in May 1985-- all dead. So then I placed an order direct with Bailey's to come air express. They arrived May 1, in pretty good shape.

Two hundred 'Northblue' and 'Northsky' were set out in raised beds of straight peat moss. I must say some of these plants should never have been dug. Although the main stem of the plant seemed adequate the branching was minimal. Although they were listed as 1 year transplants in my estimation they were culls and should never have left the nursery. By the end of the first year I had lost 40 plants. The remainder are vigorous growers and will need to be transplanted in spring 1988 to provide more growing room.

Bulletins from Vermont on blueberry cultivation suggest a pH of 4.0 to 5.5 and my beds are about that. For fertilizer I'm using ammonium sulfate in the spring and aluminum sulphate in the fall for acidity.

There did not seem to be any loss or injury from the winter of 1986-87. I do believe there was a short spell of -40°F and probably several days of -25°F. At this time there has been no trouble with birds or small animals.

I'm also growing Swedish black currants. They love the soil and the climate and are spreading rapidly. This is an excellent plant to fight soil erosion as well as provide another flavor in the jelly kitchen. Mixed black and red currants create a super flavored jelly.

-Phil Richardson, Anchorage and Talkeetna
