

ALASKA NAFEX NEWSLETTER

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MEETING DATES

OCT National Bank of Alaska
lunchroom. Call Erik Simpson
for date and time.

HALF-HIGH BLUEBERRIES

I have quite an extensive collection of the three original cultivars of half-high blueberries that were developed at the U of Minnesota ('Northblue', 'Northsky' and 'Northcountry'). All of the plants at my home (1000 ft elevation) and at the experimental plots at the Univ of Alaska Fairbanks test plots (454 ft elevation) survived very well despite the severe cold last winter. Some of them showed typical nitrogen deficiency symptoms (yellowish-red leaves) that were ameliorated by fertilization with an ammonium-based nitrogen fertilizer. My five-year-old plants are still only about 12 inches high, and any new growth above the snow is quickly killed. One plant has

been fruiting for 3 years. It is not very productive when compared to commercial blueberries or these same cultivars grown in Minnesota, but the fruit is large, sweet and tasty. No fruit has ever gotten to my kitchen; it is quickly gobbled up before we set foot out of the garden. Rumor has it that U of Minnesota is going to release a few more cultivars soon, so stay tuned for more information.

In a 1988 article in Fruit Varieties Journal (42 (4): 126-129), A. Rabaey and J. Luby note that cultivars differ in their requirement for self or cross pollination. The cultivar 'Northblue' can be planted alone and has good fruit set from either self or cross pollination. On the other hand, 'Northsky' and 'Northcountry' need to be cross pollinated for best fruit set and size, so you need to plant more than one cultivar.

One of the best ways to ensure good fruit set on half-highs as well as other fruit crops is by keeping colonies of bees nearby. There are several beekeeping organizations in Alaska that are definitely worth contacting about bees. If you don't care to bother with bees yourself, a member of the beekeeping association might be willing to have some hives near your plants. In the Interior, the contact person is Steve Petersen (1153 Donna Dr. Fairbanks, AK 99701) who writes an excellent newsletter called "Bee-muse". There are other associations in south-central, Ak. Contact your local Cooperative Extension Service agent for addresses.

-P. Holloway

RHUBARB TRIALS IN PALMER

Cathy Wright at the Plant Materials Center in Palmer has conducted variety trials on rhubarb since 1986. In 1988, yields per plant from 3 harvests per season ranged from 10.8 lb to 26.8 lb with the cultivar 'Honey Red' consistently yielding better than 6 other cultivars. Cultivars ranked from highest to lowest yield in 1988 were: 'Honey Red', 'Sutton Seedless', 'Canada Red', 'Apple' and 'Victoria'. The 'McDonald' plants were severely

injured by glaciation in 1986-7 and had extremely poor yields.

So why are we, a fruit organization, writing an article about rhubarb? It certainly isn't a fruit! Botanically, the edible portion of rhubarb is a leaf stem or petiole, but because of its use primarily as a dessert (pie) or in jam, horticulturally it is considered a fruit crop.

The plant materials center has published a 1-page summary of their rhubarb trials which gives more information on yields and variety descriptions. Copies are available from Cathy at HC 02 Box 7440 Palmer, AK 99645.

SOME THOUGHTS ON ROOT-STOCKS (In light of the winter of 1988-89)

Based on Erik Simpson's and my experience and observations, both before, during and after the "test winter" of 1988-89, I would like to share some thoughts with other NAFEX members about rootstocks for certain tree fruits.

Many NAFEX members have been attempting to grow pears on Pyrus communis (seedling pear) and some on the Old Home x Farmingdale 333 rootstocks. The 'Tyson' pear on OH x F333, which I bought in 1986 and which had easily survived the -18 F in 1987-88, died back to the snowline after -34 F. This

tree was in a pot but heavily mulched. Erik Simpson's 'Gifford', 'Summercrisp', 'Tyson' and 'Hudar' on that rootstock also died this past winter.

By contrast, 'Gifford' on P.communis, a tree grafted in April 1988, survived the -34 F for Rich Raynor. Summercrisp on P.communis, survived -38 F for Dick Green and -20 F for Doug Tryck. The regrettable conclusion is that OH x F333 is not reliably hardy in Anchorage.

The better way to proceed is to graft 'Hudar', 'Gifford', 'Tyson' and some of the other moderately hardy pears (e.g. 'Parker', 'Patten') onto P.communis. If you have a cultivar like 'Ure' or 'Summercrisp' that is equally compatible with P.communis or P.ussuriensis, consider grafting it onto the Ussurian pear instead.

Erik also reported that his 'Van' sweet cherry survived, leafed out, and blossomed, but

later died because the Mazzard rootstock had been killed last winter. A 'Meteor' pie cherry on Mazzard also died. By contrast, 'North Star' on Mahaleb) survived, bloomed, and set a good amount of fruit.

Young trees of the Bill Baird pie cherry appear in all cases to have survived the winter. Since sweet cherries can be grafted to pie cherries, perhaps this would be a good rootstock for those who still want to experiment with sweet cherries.

To report some better news on pears, the 'Nova' pear I purchased in 1986 from St. Lawrence Nursery, produced about 20 blossoms in early June at its temporary home in western Washington. The blossom buds were directly exposed to the -34 F in my back yard. One pear resulted, and as of Aug 19, it was 2 inches long.

- R. Purvis

1990 DUES \$7.00

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