

ALASKA NAFEX NEWSLETTER

A PUBLICATION OF THE ALASKA CHAPTER, NORTH AMERICAN FRUIT
EXPLORERS (NAFEX)

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MEETING DATES

Feb. 8 Second Thurs. NBA lunch room, 7 p.m. Update on apples. Slides and discussion on varieties as grown in southeast Alaska. Also, there will be a report by Cathy Wright, horticulturist at the Plant Materials Center, Palmer. For several years, Ms. Wright has made field tests and observations on a number of apple varieties in this state-funded project. From her report, NAFEX members should be better observers of the PMC apple orchard when attending the mid-summer open house.

Mar. 8 Preparations for spring. NBA lunchroom, 7 p.m.

April 12 Tree grafting party. 7 p.m. 8th and Gambell (Former Chugach Electric Building)

May Feeding, watering and soil testing for different fruit crops. Time/place TBA

June Seedling/rooted cutting exchange

September Seed gathering/
winter preparations

October Fruit tasting

FAIRBANKS TREE GRAFTING WORKSHOP

A tree grafting workshop is scheduled for Sat., April 7, 1990 in 301 O'Neill Resource Building, UAF West Ridge, 1:00 p.m. Erik Simpson plans to come up from Anchorage and bring the plants members have ordered from Whitney's. He will also bring 50 baccata, 50 ranetka and 25 Ussurian pear rootstocks for members to purchase. The Anchorage members will also be grafting some 'Van' cherries. If any Fairbanks member thinks they have a suitable rootstock and would like to try some, call Erik A.S.A.P. Also, if you have any special requests for scionwood, put your requests in to Erik. Call Pat Holloway for more details and directions to the meeting.

EXPANSIONS AND CORRECTIONS

The book recommended in the November meeting as emphasizing north country gardening is titled Cold Climate Gardening by Lewis Hill from Garden Way Publishers.

Information on cold frames and greenhouses as distributed in the January meeting was excerpted from October and November 1989 issues of National Gardening. This magazine is published by the National Gardening Assoc. 180 Flynn Ave. Burlington, VT 05401. Its thrust is on fruit and vegetable gardening. Membership is \$18.00 per year, with 60 percent tax deductible.

-Erik Simpson

SUMMARY OF JANUARY MEETING

Wayne Vandre from the Cooperative Extension Service spoke to our chapter on how to provide a favorable growing environment in a greenhouse for those of us who desire an improved environment to grow better fruits and vegetables. He presented an extensive slide show of greenhouses in Alaska and discussed the advantages and disadvantages encountered with each structure. The first slides demonstrated the necessity for using translucent materials that would let in the proper amount of light for good plant growth. The next set of

slides demonstrated the need to control temperatures between 65F and 80F using fans, vents or raised structures. Humidity should also be controlled in this manner with air movement and ventilation to prevent mildew and fungus from attacking your plants.

Hanging baskets, vertical wall pots, or A-frame stands can be used to maximize space without substantially reducing the available light. Any inside walls should be painted white to maximize lighting. A small air pump can be used to separate two walls of plastic to create a thermal wall of air or you can purchase dual wall fiberglass pannels to reduce heat loss and provide a longer growing season. Most greenhouses require some source of heat during May and June and between August and September. Inside walls can be insulated to reduce heat loss. Small solar collectors consisting of gallon water jugs work well to prevent temperatures from getting too hot during the day and too cold at night because they serve as heat reservoirs. A greenhouse can be attached to your home to heat and cool your home through the use of fans and thermostatic control devices.

If fluorescent lighting is used to supplement sunlight, the lighting should be 10-18 inches above the plants and

raised as they grow taller. Information on various types of greenhouse construction and supply outlets are available from the Extension Service. For greenhouse supplies and equipment such as fans, you can contact Alaska Greenhouse or Alaska Mill and Feed in Anchorage.

Wayne recommended artificial sterilized potting mixes which can be purchased, or you can make your own soil mix and sterilize it. Soil mixes can be made by using 1/3 loam or fine sand plus 1/3 coarse sand plus 1/3 milled sphagnum moss or other ingredient (not peat) to retain water. Soils can be sterilized in an oven at 160 F for 20 minutes or with the use of steam. At the end of the season you should remove all plant materials from your soil or pots to prevent disease and fungus from reappearing in the soil next season.

Editorial comment: Dianne Lillian in Halibut Cove has successfully grown fruit trees in an open-frame Quonset hut greenhouse for several years now. This open style greenhouse structure may have commercial potential in Alaska. Wild bees will enter the structure and pollinate the fruit blossoms. -Erik Simpson

MOOSE PROBLEMS ?

If you have not covered or protected your fruit trees from

the moose, you may want to do so immediately. Deep snows and scarce moose feed has already created problems in Anchorage and the Mat-Su Valley. For a quick solution it is advisable to cover fruit trees less than 5 feet tall with landscape cloth or bird netting. These products will breathe and not retain water. More permanent structures can be built out of a 1 x 2 inch wood frame and chicken wire which can be built in the shape of a screen door frame and wired together in sets of three or more. Make sure the moose cannot reach down through the top. This type of fence can be frozen to the ground with water or slush ice so it will not blow over or be knocked down. This fence can be dismantled in sections and stored during the summer months. Permanent fencing is a good idea to prevent dogs and children from ruining your trees or fruit. Large dogs such as my Akita, Niko, cannot resist the temptation to chew and destroy fruit stems and branches in the spring when the sap starts to flow or at any other time she happens to feel like it. I now have my fruit trees enclosed within a five foot wire fence in my back yard. - Erik Simpson

YUKON GARDENS

I visited Yukon Gardens in Whitehorse, YT this past

summer, and I would recommend it to anyone who happens to be in that area. Yukon Gardens has a significant planting of fruit trees including apples, cherries, plums and pears. The trees are planted in a large L-shaped raised bed facing south and west, backed by a wood fence. Upon asking, I found that the trees had overwintered for 2 years, came from Alberta Nurseries, were severely pruned in the fall, and then wrapped in burlap. None had fruit. The trees were all small, but some looked very healthy. Unfortunately, I don't remember any of the specific varieties, But I do remember there were quite a few boy's names. In any case, it is certainly worth a visit.

-Leslie Toombs.

VISIT TO ST. LAWRENCE NURSERIES

On Nov 20-21, 1989 I visited St. Lawrence Nurseries near Potsdam New York. Bill and Diana Mackentley own and operate the nursery. We discussed problems related to propagation of nursery stock. He had an unusually large number of failures in grafting new trees of 'Nova' pear onto Pyrus communis rootstocks from Lawyer Nursery this past spring. I described the problems I had with Toka' plum trees from Lawyer being in deep dormancy, a problem

practically unknown in his own nursery operation. When I related how the plum's bark had been somewhat wrinkled, we suspected that desiccation of the root system followed by desiccation of the cambium, could be the cause of both his problems and mine. The cure suggested to me by Dan Lawyer-- wrapping the trees in wet burlap, keeping them warm, and keeping them in the dark-- would address the drying out somewhat. Dried-out rootstocks would have difficulty forming successful graft unions because callus tissue forms best from cambium with a high moisture content. A lesson from this is to soak the roots of freshly grafted rootstocks for up to 12 hours before planting them in soil or in bark dust.

Bill likes to make his grafts at the root crown, where there's an obvious change in the color of the bark. This, the most juvenile part of the root system, has a high ability to form callus tissue, he feels. When the scion is hardier than the rootstock, this makes it easy to plant the graft union below ground as, for example, in the case of 'Nova' and 'Summercrisp' pear on P. communis. Bill plans to begin propagating his pear trees on P. kirchensaller in 1990 and his plums on P. salicina mand-schurica, which should impart additional hardiness and vigor to them. He occasionally uses

custom-grown trees from Lawyer to make up for shortfalls in what he grows himself.

The 'Nova' is his best-selling pear; he sold 231 trees in 1989. Introduced in 1980, it is named after 'Nova', his 10-year-old daughter. Of the 153 apple varieties in his collection, 'Yellow Transparent' is the one in most demand. 'Waneta', a Gage-type plum, is his best selling plum. I learned that the 'Hudar' pear, which ripens around the time of 'Yellow Transparent' is named for John Hudar, who owns the land where the mother tree is located, 40 miles from Potsdam.

Bill pointed out that although the university-sponsored plant breeding programs deserve support, there are already new and noteworthy fruit varieties growing as seedling trees or bushes in abandoned orchards, along country roads, and elsewhere, waiting only for a horticultural Indiana Jones to discover, collect, grow and propagate them.

I had a good look at the inner workings of the nursery. Finding qualified help is a problem for him, just as it is for most nurseries. Major expenses include wrapping materials such as plastic, polyethylene, burlap twine, and bark shavings for packages, but there are other expenses as

well such as labor and buying new tools. While I was there Bill and Diana were negotiating with printing companies for publishing his 1990 catalog. In light of all this, his price of \$10.00 per tree is quite reasonable.

For him, the greatest satisfaction of being a nurseryman was being able to place hardy fruit trees in the hands of his customers. I was impressed with his thorough knowledge of horticulture, his ability to work skillfully with his hands, but most of all with his integrity and openness. The latter qualities were shown by his comment that if a customer tried to order a tree from him which would not be winter-hardy in their climate, he would tell the, so and suggest alternatives. He feels many people have become soured on fruit growing as a result of dealing with nurseries more interested in earning a quick profit than in providing a quality product. When I left Bill gave me a small 'Precious' apricot tree, a variety I had wanted to try for a long time. More importantly, though, I took away the knowledge that he is a reliable nurseryman.

-Bob Purvis

**DON'T FORGET. PAY YOUR
1990 DUES TODAY!**