

# ALASKA NAFEX NEWSLETTER

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## MEETING DATES

NOV 15 7 p.m. NBA lunchroom. Erik Simpson will talk about edible fruit for southcentral, Alaska and availability of plants from Whitney Nursery, Clair's Cultivations and Rocky Meadow Nursery (sweet cherries). Also election of officers.

## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

At the November meeting, new officers will be elected for the position of Secretary and President. We also need new Board members. Please help us keep an active and progressive organization by volunteering your time. We also need more articles for the Newsletter -- fruit survival notes, book reviews, fruit recipes, addresses of supplies and plant materials. The Newsletter is only as good as you make it. WE NEED YOUR HELP NOW!

## NEW NAME FOR ALASKA NAFEX

The Anchorage members and the Board of Directors have decided upon a new name for the Alaska Chapter of NAFEX: **Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers**. Before adopting this new name, we would like to hear from all our members. If you have any comments or changes to recommend, please contact Dell Kuk (address and phone above) by December 1.

## PROPOSED FAIRBANKS AND HOMER GRAFTING WORKSHOPS

Members interested in having a grafting workshop in Fairbanks and Homer must place orders for rootstocks as soon as possible with Erik Simpson. He will

purchase plant materials in bulk quantities at considerable savings to members. Contact Erik for additional information.

## SWEET CHERRY OBSERVATIONS

(article continued from October)

It is worth mentioning the cherries which were not ripe. 'Stella' which is self-fertile, was not ripe, and neither were 'Yellow Glass' or 'Gold', two extremely hardy yellow sweet cherries. 'Hedelfingen', an old German Variety, was barely ripe (it ripens ahead of 'Stella'). The tree of 'Lapins' in the collection was juvenile, but it also is a very late-ripening sweet cherry although it has almost every quality one might desire: firmness, sweetness, self-fertility, crack resistance, and very large size. 'Lapins', a cross of 'Van' with 'Stella' is also reputed to be quite hardy and has met with high customer acceptance when sold commercially in British Columbia, its province of origin.

Concerning tart cherries, 'North Star' was barely ripe, and 'Meteor' was not ripe on June 16. 'Early Richmond' was ripe, however. The biggest surprise in the tart cherry row was a Wisconsin cultivar named 'Del Nord'. Fruits on it measured typically 3/4 to 7/8 inch across. A dark red color, the fruit looked similar to 'Bing'. They had a delightful mixture of sweetness and tartness. Hardiness is unknown, but since the tree is from Wisconsin, it should be well worth a try in Anchorage and points south. 'Mesabi', another pie cherry which was developed in Minnesota, was not of bearing age. It is hardier than sweet cherries (Zone 4 in the Bailey Nursery wholesale catalog) and intermediate in flavor between sweet and tart cherries.

Budwood is normally available from August 1 to March 1 from the IR-2 collection. Write to the Irrigated Agriculture Research and Extension Center, Route 2 Box 2953A, Prosser, WA 99350-0687, attention Bill Howell. The phone number is (509)

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786-2226 for the station. The cost is \$5.00 postpaid per budstick, with a minimum of \$10.00 per order. By ordering wood of some of these non-commercial cherries you, in effect, cast a vote for retaining them in the IR-2 collection where they are accessible to anyone who wants to propagate them.

-Robert Purvis

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## HARDY PEARS - COMMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS

By Bob Purvis

While visiting the Sannichton Plant Quarantine Station on Vancouver Island, B.C., September 10, 1990, I tasted some of the hardy pear varieties recommended in times past to members of the Alaska NAFEX. Because Whitney's O & N has been propagating these for Alaska NAFEX members, I was anxious to see what I could learn about their flavor and ripening times.

I found every 'Ure' pear but one was on the ground. The windfalls were a bit overripe, relatively small (2 to 2-1/2 inches in diameter) and nearly round, with a tawny, yellowish-brown skin. The flavor was good; there was no astringency associated with it. The texture was smooth, the skin thin and tender on the fruits I tried. The Morden, Manitoba Research Station introduced this cross of Pyrus ussuriensis x Pyrus communis in 1978 and named it after Frank Ure, a Canadian pear breeder.

In looking through four nursery catalogs I found the following information about 'Ure'. The tree is a natural semi-dwarf, fireblight resistant, and extremely hardy. Clair Lammers reported good survival of -46F by his 'Ure' in Fairbanks the winter of 1989-90. The fruit is said to keep for up to 6 weeks, and to be excellent for both fresh eating and canning. According to Dan Thompson, the 'Ure' pears at the quarantine station were ripe during the last week of August. Other hardy fruits typically ripen at the station about 4 weeks before they do in Anchorage, so this suggests that 'Ure' should ripen the last week of September in Anchorage.

'Ure' also makes a very ornamental tree. Its leaves, glossy dark green in summer, turn brilliant shades of red and purple in autumn. My own tree of 'Ure' did this about October 25 here in Pullman, defoliating two weeks before the Nova, Hudar, or Tyson pear trees in our yard. Purchased as a one-year-old tree from St. Lawrence Nurseries in 1987, my 'Ure' is now five feet tall and added about 7 inches of new growth to each terminal this past summer, after I planted it in April 1990.



'Pioneer #3' is, according to Bart Hall-Beyer's Ecological Fruit Production in the North, the second-best pear of those hardy in Canadian Zone 3, after 'Ure'. I found that on Sept. 10, 'Pioneer #3' was fairly sweet at the Saanichton station, but the flesh was rock-hard to bite into. There were few windfalls on the ground also. This suggests that 'Pioneer #3', though hardy, may not ripen fully in Anchorage. Of course, like most pears it can and should be picked slightly green and ripened indoors. The firm flesh may make it good for canning, but I have seen no comments in Canadian catalogs about it. It is slightly larger than 'Ure', about 2-1/2 to 3 inches in diameter based on what I saw.

'Gifford' is a pear which the Quarantine Station obtained from Vineland, Ontario. The National Clonal Germplasm Repository at Corvallis, OR lists

both 'Gifford' and 'Beurre Giffard' in its holdings. 'Gifford' is the only cultivar at Saanichton, however. There were no windfalls on the ground nor any fruit on the tree; the fruit had ripened at least three weeks earlier, according to Dan Thompson. This is the same cultivar I grafted to a Pyrus communis rootstock in April, 1988 and which withstood -34F in January 1989, and of which Whitney's O & N has some healthy 5-6 foot trees available. It appears promising for Southcentral Alaska. I hope soon to have further information from Dan Thompson on the background of 'Gifford'. From all indications, it should ripen in mid-September in Anchorage.

In January 1988, I acquired scionwood of two edible-fruited Ussurian pears, 1912-238 and ~~MM44-55~~<sup>942-358</sup>, from the Morton Arboretum in Lisle, IL. These two pears both fruited in the 'Whitneys' orchard this summer. As of September 11, neither one was ripe enough to eat. I brought some home and found after they ripened that neither one was nearly as tasty as a 'Ure'. The skin was thick and tough, the flesh somewhat gritty, coarse, and astringent. In light of the relatively poor quality and late ripening time, these appear unpromising for Alaska.

'Ure', 'Summercrisp', and 'Nova' appear to be the best cultivars to try in Fairbanks. These, along with 'Gifford', 'Hudar', and 'Stacey' also are worth planting in Anchorage and points south.

American sources of the above are Moosebell Flower, Fruit, & Tree Co., Rt. 1, Box 240, St. Francis, ME 04774 (Ure); Fedco Trees, 52 Mayflower Hill Drive, Waterville, ME 04901 (Ure, Summercrisp); Swedburg Nursery, Box 418, Battle Lake, MN 56515 (Ure, Summercrisp); St. Lawrence Nurseries, R.D. 2, Potsdam NY 13676 (Nova, Hudar, Summercrisp, Stacey); and Whitney's O & N, 8421 Naches Heights Road, Cowiche, WA 98928 (Ure, Summercrisp, Pioneer #3, Gifford).