

# ALASKA PIONEER FRUIT GROWERS' NEWSLETTER

A Publication of the Alaska Chapter, North American Fruit Explorers (NAFEX)

April 1992

Volume 7/Number 4

President: **Erik Simpson**, 7225 Blackberry Street, Anchorage, AK 99502. Phone 243-3058.

Vice President: **Bob Boyer**, P.O. Box 9-1376, Anchorage, AK 99509. Phone 561-2885.

Secretary: **Pam Neiswanger Warner**, 7000 Viburnum Drive, Anchorage, AK 99507.

Treasurer: **Del Simpson**, 7225 Blackberry Street, Anchorage, AK 99502. Phone 243-3058.

Fifth Board Member: **River Bean**, HC 04, Box 9043, Palmer, AK 99645. Phone 746-1087.

Editor: **Pam Neiswanger Warner**, 7000 Viburnum Drive, Anchorage, AK 99507. Phone 344-9749.

## UPCOMING MEETINGS

We will be conducting our annual tree-grafting workshop on **Thursday, April 16, 1992, 7:00-9:00 p.m.**, at the **Dimond Greenhouses**, 1050 West Dimond Boulevard (between Arctic Boulevard and Minnesota Drive), Anchorage. Come early and bring a sharp, thin-bladed knife. **Bob Boyer** will also have his new chip-budder and top-grafter available. A minimal fee will be charged for scionwood and rootstocks. This is always an extremely popular event—and this year we have more choices than ever (see page four). Come and join us!

**May 21, 1992, same time/same place.** Plans are not finalized as yet, but we are attempting to put together a tour of local members' orchards. Call **Erik Simpson** (243-3058) if you know of an orchard that should be included.

Please mark your calendars ahead so we can share your company on meeting nights. Hope to see you there!

## SOME TIPS FROM GARFIELD SHULTS

By **Bob Boyer**

Garfield Shults, an earnest experimental grafter from Homedale, Idaho, says that cherry plums will double or triple in size if budded on apricot rootstock.

He also says that, when grafted, trees will grow much faster and produce earlier if fertilized with "Rico Verde", a product of Agronics, 701 Madison NE, Albuquerque, NM 87110, phone (505) 298-1748. Incidentally, Agronics is owned by Colonel Leland Taylor, who spent some time in Alaska in the early days—Wally Hickel worked for him at one time. The only problem with the fertilizer is that it is a little spendy; the least expensive way to ship it is by mail—and it's heavy.

I read an article written by Garfield Shults in the winter 1992 issue of *Pomona* and called to order scionwood from him (apples, cherry plum, walnut, and a peach). He was a delight to talk with and he gave me one more tip to pass along: when grafting onto Nanking cherry (*Prunus tomentosa*), leave a branch about eight inches (8") long on one shoot of the tree, while grafting onto another shoot; cut any remaining shoots off. Let the eight-inch stem leaf out. This will allow any excess sap to flow to this additional stem and keep the graft from drowning in its own sap.

I really enjoy reading *Pomona*, and everyone I've corresponded with or called has been very nice and helpful.

---

## EUROPEAN PLUMS FOR ALASKA

By **Bob Purvis**

Over the past 10 years, a number of early-ripening apple varieties have become available to Alaskan fruit growers. Only a little work has been done, however, on finding European plum (*Prunus domestica*) cultivars suitable for Alaska, but there are some good reasons for considering them for home orchards south of the Alaska Range.

As a species of *Prunus*, European plums are less hardy (zones 3-4) than the American hybrid plums, but hardier than Japanese plums (*Prunus salicina*). Generally self-fertile, they bear fruit on fairly long-lived spurs and are less vigorous than the aforementioned plums. They bloom much later in the season (typically with

apple trees) and are more tolerant of heavier soils, but are a bit slower to come into production. The fruits are sweeter, smaller, and less juicy than Japanese or American hybrid plums and, as such, appear to be considerably more frost-resistant in the fall. The Washington State University orchard in Pullman, Washington, has a number of trees of "President", a European plum that does not ripen there until late October or early November. During the last three (3) growing seasons, I have noticed that even after exposure to temperatures in the low 20°s overnight, "President" prune plums do not turn to mush, but remain firm whether on the tree or off. By contrast, seedling Manchurian plums in Dale Hall's orchard in Anchorage were badly damaged by frosts in the 28°-to-30°F range in September 1987. Furthermore, at least in Pullman, European plums ("Early Italian", "Italian", and "President") are very reliable croppers, little affected by the same wintertime freeze/thaw/freeze cycles that wreak havoc on peaches, apricots, and sometimes sweet cherries and even pears.

"Stanley", one of the best known European plums, has survived and even borne fruit in Homer for Fred and Margaret Anderson, but the fruit never ripened—hardly surprising considering that in Geneva, New York, "Stanley" is ripe on the average about September 22, and the season there is four (4) weeks ahead of southcentral Alaska. "Stanley" and the Myrobalan rootstock it was grafted to also survived and grew well in west Anchorage for Rich Raynor, a member of this chapter, at least for the period 1984-1989. Are there other European plums that ripen earlier, yet have the required hardiness?

The answer appears to be yes. "Mount Royal" has survived and even ripened fruit in Juneau. It is described in the Hilltop Trees' catalog of Newark Nurseries, Inc., as a "very hardy, excellent blue plum that originated near Montreal, Canada. The fruits are medium size, round, yellow-fleshed, with good quality. The tree is medium in vigor, very hardy, and productive." The Swedburg Nursery catalog offers some additional comments on "Mount Royal", calling its fruit freestone, with meaty, tender, juicy, sweet flesh, and adds that it is suitable for dessert and culinary purposes. Furthermore, it can be dried to make prunes. The Hilltop catalog shows the average picking date for "Mount Royal" in southwestern Michigan as August 15-30, corresponding to September 30-October 15 for Anchorage, which is quite late.

A better choice, also described in the Hilltop catalog, is "Opal". The Southmeadow Fruit Gardens' publication, *Choice and Unusual Fruit Varieties for the Connoisseur and Home Gardener*, states that "Opal" originated as a cross of "Oullins" with "Early Favourite" at Alnarp, Sweden. First marketed in Sweden in 1948, it since has become "the leading quality plum in Swedish markets." The Southmeadow publication adds that "Opal" is self-fertile and an excellent cropper. The Hilltop catalog comments that the tree is of medium vigor, semi-upright, and hardy. It calls the fruit semi-freestone, medium firm, round, reddish-purple with yellow flesh and good quality. Moreover, Alan F. Simmons' book, *Simmons' Manual of Fruit* (London: David and Charles, 1978, 239 pages), which I found in the Ag Science Library at WSU, says that the tree is rather round-headed, fairly dense, and early flowering.

According to Simmons, "Opal" ripens in England about the second week of August. In southwestern Michigan, "Opal" is picked July 25-August 5 on the average, which corresponds to September 10-20 in Anchorage.

Hilltop sells one European plum which is even earlier than "Opal", namely "Earliblue". It describes it as "the earliest maturing blue plum we know of. Fruit resembles Stanley, but is softer and has shorter shelf life. Good quality and appearance. Sells readily at roadside. Tree is hardy and productive." The pick date in Michigan, July 20-30, corresponds to September 5-15 in Anchorage. However, I can find no other information about the plum in other references. None of these varieties are patented.

With respect to availability, "Opal", "Earliblue", and "Mount Royal" are available (wholesale only, in bundles of five [5] trees) at Hilltop (Newark Nurseries, Inc.; P.O. Box 578; Hartford, MI 49057; phone [616] 621-3135 or toll free [800] 253-2911). "Opal" on Myrobalan rootstocks is available retail at Whitney's Orchard & Nursery (contact me for availability at [509] 697-9765 or write me at my new address, 641 Hoffman Road, Selah, WA 98942-9532) and at Southmeadow Fruit Gardens, 15310 Red Arrow Highway, Lakeside, MI 49116. "Mount Royal" is available from Swedburg Nurseries, Inc.; Box 418; Battle Lake, MN 56515; phone (218) 864-5526, and from Farmer Seed & Nursery, a division of Plantron, Inc.; Fairbault, MN 55021; phone (507) 334-1623.

---

## VARIETY EVALUATION RECORDS

By Erik Simpson

All pioneer fruit growers should keep accurate records of their cultivars in order to document what they are doing and to record their successes and failures. The reasons for your successes can be written down for you and others to duplicate in the future. Your failures can also be written down to avoid making them again.

Take the time to jot down information on the varieties you are growing today. Taking into consideration your microclimate, hardiness zone, and growing season, it is possible to get descriptions of the apples, cherries, pears, raspberries, etc., that you would like to try; this valuable information can also be recorded on a variety evaluation record. Once your cultivar produces fruit (and especially if it won't produce or ripen), you can record additional information on your record, such as ripening dates and general observations, together with your description of the fruit, and then decide whether or not you want to keep it or recommend it to other growers. New edible varieties are discovered every year and many are waiting to be tried. Knowing what varieties will or will not produce in your location with your growing season is important to you and to all of us. This year, take the step to becoming a better gardener—record your results and share your growing record with others.

The **Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers** is currently in the process of publishing *Edible Tree Fruits of Alaska* (an accumulated record of much experience and hard-won wisdom, made

possible by those growers who have kept notes on their trials and errors, their successes and failures), and so far we have identified over 90 known varieties of tree fruits growing in Alaska that can be recommended to others. If you already have records on edible varieties which have produced, please complete a variety evaluation record (I've included a master form for your use) and send a copy to me or to **Pam Neiswanger Warner** by the end of April. We can then include the edible tree fruits that you have produced in the first issue of our publication. We will not disclose your name or location unless you wish to make trees or scionwood available (or unless you want to brag!)

(**Editor's note:** Because different people like different forms, I will be providing additional master form variety evaluation sheets for your use in the next few months. I'm sure that you'll all be able to find one that you like and enjoy using—and that's the important thing, to find one that you'll use.)

---

### ALASKA PIONEER FRUIT GROWERS SCIONWOOD AVAILABLE FOR GRAFTING IN APRIL 1992

**Adams County Nursery.** Sweet cherries: Gold, Viscount, Vista, and Ulster.

**Bear Creek Nursery.** Apples: Almata, Breaky, Champlain, Chenango Strawberry, Discovery, Dudley, Early Joe, Geneva Early, Goodland, Heyer 20, High Top Sweet, July Red, Lowland Raspberry, Mantet, Norland, Oriole, Palouse,

Patton, Pecks Pleasant, Quinte, Rosthern 18,  
Sops of Wine, and Sweet Sixteen.

**Christian Homesteading Movement.** Apples:  
Beautiful Arcade, Burgundy, Chenango  
Strawberry, and CHM-7. Cherries: Bada  
cherry.

**Clair's Cultivations.** Pears: Tioma.

**Northwind Nursery.** Apples: Iowa Beauty  
and Melba.

**Northwoods Nursery.** Apples: Wynooche  
Early.

**Pacific Northwest Fruit Testers'  
Association.** Apples: Sunrise, Arlet, and  
Sansa.

**Whitney's Orchard & Nursery.** Apples:  
Adina, Beacon, Carnival, Carroll, Chinese Golden  
Early, Crimson Beauty, Fall Red, Geneva Early,  
Heyer 12, July Red, Lodi, Mantet, Niagara,  
Noran, Norcue, Norda, Noret, Norhey, Norland,  
Norson, Parkland, Patterson, Puritan, Red  
Duchess, Rescue, September Ruby, State Fair,  
Trail, Trailman, Vista Bella, Westland, Yellow  
Transparent, and Yellow Transparent Koeniger.  
Pears: Giffard. Plums: Opal and Ptitsin 9.

---

### EDITOR'S NOTES

At last month's meeting, **Kim Kuk**  
presented a great program on growing  
raspberries. It was one of the best programs  
I've had the privilege of attending at our

evening meetings—I hope you were there, too.  
Yea, Kim!

The next installment of **Leslie Toombs'**  
article, Apples for Alaska: Don't Forget the  
Classics, which began in the January 1992  
issue of our newsletter, will be in next month's  
newsletter. Watch for it here.

We are attempting to put together a  
scrapbook of the fruit-growing accomplishments  
of our members and friends. Do you have any  
good photos of your fruit and/or beds and  
orchards you would like to contribute? Please  
send me your photos (with the grower's name,  
cultivar name, photo date, and location on the  
back, if possible) and we will try and assemble  
them in some kind of order. We hope this  
scrapbook will help generate interest and  
attract new members to our chapter—not to  
mention knocking the socks off the public at  
large!

And last, but not least, I had the pleasure  
of visiting with **Bob Purvis** today (you may  
have noticed his new address and telephone  
number above). Bob and Connie have been in  
their new home for a little over a month now,  
and so far he's planted 53 fruit trees in his  
back pasture—some of which are already setting  
fruit! He also told me that he will be defending  
his thesis in early May (May 3?) and, if all goes  
well, graduating in early June (June 9?). Way  
to go, Bob! We're all pulling for you!

See you all next month . . .

ALASKA PIONEER FRUIT GROWERS  
VARIETY EVALUATION RECORD

All fruit growers should keep accurate gardening notes. The reasons for your success could be written down (to duplicate them in the future), as well as your failures (in order to avoid them).

Your success in growing edible fruit is everything. It is our evaluation as to how well we are doing our job.

Take the time to jot down the variety information, events, dates and general observations during the growing season. This year, take a step toward being a better gardener. Photocopy this page and take some notes!

Cultivar: \_\_\_\_\_ Parentage: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Purchases: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Transplanted: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Acquired: \_\_\_\_\_ Source: \_\_\_\_\_

**CHARACTERISTICS:**

Fruit Type: \_\_\_\_\_ Vigor: \_\_\_\_\_

Skin Color: \_\_\_\_\_ Size: \_\_\_\_\_

Shape: \_\_\_\_\_ Hardiness: \_\_\_\_\_

Flavor: \_\_\_\_\_ Maturity Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Texture: \_\_\_\_\_ Storage Life: \_\_\_\_\_

Soil or Plant Problems/Treatment: \_\_\_\_\_

Variety Description: \_\_\_\_\_

Yearly Harvest Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

Observations: \_\_\_\_\_

How would you rate the fruit on a scale of 1 to 10?: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you grow this variety again?  No  Yes

Retest next year?  No  Yes

PHOTOCOPY THIS PAGE