

Southwest Florida Tropical Fruit News

covering Naples and Bonita Springs, Florida

January 2008

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Club news

Collier Fruit Growers Council

The next meeting is **Monday, January 21**. The speaker will be Tim Gast, citrus horticulturist for Southern Gardens Citrus, who will be talking about citrus greening. Southern Gardens, one of the state's top producers, was one of the first commercial producers to be hit hard by citrus greening.

The club meets the third Monday of the month at 7 pm for socializing, 7:30 pm for the program.

NOTE: January's meeting will be held at the Naples Botanical Garden. The Naples Botanical Garden is located at the corner of Bayshore Dr. & Thomasson Dr. For directions, call the Garden at 643-7275. Enter the Garden via the main gate on Thomasson.

Tasting table. Janet Puig is overseeing the tasting table. Please wash and cut up fruit before you bring it to make the whole process easier. It'd also help if you bring a sign identifying the fruit with your name.

Membership. Yearly membership is \$25; renewals before February 1, \$15. Send checks to Mary Fehr, 137 Debron Dr., Naples FL 34112.

Upcoming dates. February 5, field trip to Paradise Farms, an organic farm, and Schnebly's Winery in Homestead (see page 2 for details). March 15, 2008, spring tree sale.

Bonita Springs Tropical Fruit Club

The next meeting is **Tuesday, January 8**. The speaker for January is Ted Tidwell with new information on 1st EnviroSafety's Bio-Wash organic soap.

Meetings are the second Tuesday of the month, beginning at 7:00 pm at the First United Methodist Church, 27690 Shriver Ave., Bonita Springs (from Old 41, turn east on Crockett and left on Shriver).

NOTE: The board of directors will meet at 6:30 pm prior to the monthly meeting.

Bi-monthly meeting. The discussion group meets January 22 at 7 pm at the church.

Membership. Yearly membership is \$15. Send checks to Tom Betts, 25071 Pennyroyal Lane, Bonita Springs, FL 34134.

fruit calendar

January 8. Bonita Springs Tropical Fruit Club meeting. 7:30 pm. First United Methodist Church, 27690 Shriver Ave., Bonita Springs. 851-4448.

January 21. Collier Fruit Growers' Council meeting. 7:00 pm. Naples Botanical Garden, 4820 Bayshore Dr., Naples. 643-7275.

January 28. Naples Native Plant Society meeting. 7:00 pm. Naples Botanical Garden, 4820 Bayshore Dr., Naples. 643-7275.

What fruits are ripe

Avocado	Miracle fruit
Banana	Papaya
Canistel	Sapodilla
Carambola	Sapote, black
Citrus	Sapote, mamey
Coconut	Soursop
Macadamia nut	

Collier Fruit Growers Council

The Collier Fruit Growers Council is an active non-profit organization dedicated to introducing, propagating and distributing the many rare tropical and subtropical fruits grown throughout the world, as well as offering education in these areas and encouragement to extend their cultivation. CFGC functions without regard to race, color or national origin.

Field trip Feb. 5

Collier Fruit Growers is sponsoring a field trip Tuesday, February 5, to Homestead to sample fine wine made from tropical fruit and to tour an organic fruit and vegetable farm.

The bus will depart from the Golden Gate Community Center, Golden Gate Parkway, promptly at 7:30 am, returning about 6:30 pm.

The first stop will be Paradise Farms, an organic farm in Homestead, where we'll be given a 2-hour tour, plus a chance to buy their produce.

Lunch time will be at Cauley Square, where we can browse arts and crafts shops and eat a packed lunch or at the Tea House restaurant.

The last stop will be the highlight of the day: Schnebly's Winery, where we'll have a 1-hour tour that includes sampling their fine wines. We'll also be able to browse the gift shop. See page 4.

The cost for CFGC members is \$20. Bonita Springs and Caloosa club members are also welcome at the \$20 price.

Call or email Linda Coyner (fruitnflowers@gmail.com; 530-2383) with reservations, which must be prepaid.

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January in southwest Florida

The mango trees are flowering prematurely at a time when we face the coldest part of the season. Cold could damage the flowers, but the trees will simply rebloom. More extensive cold damage would delay or jeopardize the harvest. If we're lucky enough to have another year like the last, however, we'll be on course for another super abundant mango harvest.

The next few weeks will tell the tale. Even trees that can take some cold are vulnerable if they have new growth. Hopefully you've slowed your irrigation to a trickle and avoided fertilizing so as not to induce a flush.

Cold protection strategies range from overhead and ground level irrigation, frost cloth, to bio-soap spray. Young trees, especially those not yet established, are the most vulnerable.

Citrus, on the other hand, couldn't be happier. I hope you're out there picking, enjoying, and sharing your ponkans tangerines (my favorite), juice oranges, kumquats, grapefruit, or any of the many kinds of citrus we can grow.

The weeds are still growing, albeit slower. Keep your trees well mulched to reduce competition for nutrients and moisture. Four or five inches is recommended. Avoid getting wood chips against the trunk, however, to avoid disease.

Propagation of fruit trees this time of year is still possible but why bother? If you wait until February or later your chances of success are a hundred-fold greater.

So far it's been a lousy tomato-growing season in my vegetable garden. Higher than normal temperatures sabotaged the first planting. Now prolonged cool night temperatures have stunted the second planting. There'll be one more window of opportunity in February to try again.

If you have questions relating to tropical fruits, email the newsletter (fruitnflowers@gmail.com) so we can all learn. You can also check with fellow members at our monthly meetings or contact the Collier County Extension office at 353-2872.

—Linda Coyner, Horticulturist, Naples Botanical Garden.

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Bonita Springs Tropical Fruit Club

The purpose is to introduce and distribute the many rare and tropical and subtropical fruits grown throughout the world; to inform, educate and advise members and the public in the selection of these valuable tree crops, so as to encourage their cultivation. Where possible, the organization will produce a basis for researching producing new cultivars and hybrids.

Sweet dreams from tropical wine

For Peter and Denisse Schnebly, sweet dreams are made of this: wine, from carambola, lychee and mangoes that won't grow in cooler climates.

Instead of using grapes, they're embracing Florida's agricultural strengths. In the process, they're hoping to lure visitors away from the world-class beaches, international fashion designers and hot Latin sounds of South Beach to experience other aspects of the region's natural beauty.

"Does it really matter what you made the wine from?" Peter said. "Isn't it more important that you made a good wine?"

The Schneblys started selling their wine in 2005 to cut the waste from their tropical fruit orchards. The couple farms about 100 acres in the Redland area west of Homestead and got the idea to make wine a few years earlier from one of Peter's friends who owned a winery in upstate New York.

Twenty to 40 percent of a tropical fruit crop can't be sold because it's either blemished or too ripe. Schnebly Redland's Winery was started with fruit the couple would have thrown away, but they eventually expanded to buying fruit from neighboring farms.

"We had growers that were dumping this stuff away, and now we're making wine out of that," Denisse said. "And we're paying them for it."

The Schneblys started their produce company, Fresh King Inc., about 13 years ago, shortly after they were married. They had met in South Florida when Denisse, who is from Colombia, was working as a sales representative for a produce company and Peter, a New York native, was working as a buyer for a grocery chain. With years of experience between them, they started their own business.

The wine is made in a relatively small section of their 24,000-square-foot packing facility. The stainless steel fermenting tanks can hold 20,000 gallons. But because the couple uses a variety of fruits with different growing seasons, the winery

can produce more than 100,000 gallons of wine annually.

Peter said he expects the winery to do about \$1.2 million in sales this year.

The Schneblys weren't the first ones to start using tropical fruit for wine. Florida Orange Groves Inc. and Winery in St. Petersburg has been at it for more than a decade, making wine from mango, guava and passion fruit, which are also on the Schneblys' menu.

Schnebly wine has already met with success compared with other non-grape wines, pulling in several awards. But the couple hopes to break down the stigma that non-grape wines are somehow inferior.

"We're not making any cheap wine," Denisse said. "We're making serious table wines that can be paired with food. And believe me, they will make food taste better."

Allen Susser, head chef and proprietor of Chef Allen's in Miami, believes the Schneblys are making more than a novelty wine. Besides selling their mango and passion fruit wines at his restaurant, which serves New World cuisine, Susser also likes to cook with them.



