

ALASKA NAFEX NEWSLETTER

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

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MEETING DATES

Sept. 11 Thurs. 7 p.m. Lake Otis Elem. Sch. Rm. 7. Topics: Fruit Growing in New Zealand and Tasmania; Bob Purvis, speaker.

Oct. 9 Thurs. 7 p.m. Lake Otis Elem. Sch. Rm. 7. Topics: Apple tasting party; reports on grafting and tree growth by our members.

Nov. 13 Thurs. 7 p.m. Lake Otis Elem. Sch. Rm. 7. Pears for Alaska; Julie Riley, Cooperative Extension Service, Speaker. Rootstock ordering.

Jan 8. Thurs. 7 p.m. Lake Otis Elem. Sch. Rm. 7. Apricots for Alaska; Lawrence Clark, speaker. Scionwood ordering.

Future meeting dates: Feb. 12, Mar. 12, Apr. 9 and May 14. Topics and speakers to be announced.

SEEKING ALASKA PEAR GROWERS

If you have any experience growing pears in Alaska please contact Julie Riley at the Cooperative Extension Service, 2221 E. Northern Lights Blvd., #240, Anchorage, AK 99508-4143 (279-5582 days, 345-2029 nights). Successful and unsuccessful attempts are noteworthy. Information is being compiled for the November NAFEX meeting. Your help will be appreciated.

JOIN THE NATIONAL NATIONAL NAFEX ORGANIZATION

If you aren't already a member of the national NAFEX organization, now is a good time to join. The national organization publishes quarterly issues of Pomona which contain articles on fruit growing, grafting, other propagation techniques, new and old cultivars, information on books, sources of plant materials etc. etc. Although the emphasis is on temperate fruit production, quite a few of the articles are of interest to Alaskans.

The October issue will be a special Nafex Handbook which promises to be packed with information on basic skills of fruit exploration including scion collecting, grafting, budding, etc. To obtain a copy of the Handbook as well as future issues of Pomona, fill out the application form on the last page of this newsletter. -PSH

BLACK CURRANTS- TO PRUNE OR NOT TO PRUNE.

Trials in New Zealand using the 'Magnus' cultivar of black currant indicate that fruit yields on black currants may be twice as great if the plants are left unpruned. Traditional cultural methods call for all shoot growth to be pruned back to the crown every second winter, or else wood that had fruited the previous season is pruned off to

encourage new shoot production and better fruiting. Although only one cultivar was tested, this new study seems to indicate that pruning may be unnecessary-- good news for the not-so-conscientious pruners. (excerpted from Horticultural Abstracts 56(4):237.) -PSH

APPLE ROOTSTOCKS FOR ALASKA'S "PANHANDLE"

In 1983 I began evaluating six varieties of apple rootstocks for possible use on the "Panhandle" of Alaska, a region better known for fog than for fruit. The average July temperature is 55°F, and rainfall averages 54" a year. Low winter temperatures are generally in the 20's.

The rootstocks were 1/4" caliper except for the Siberian crabapple which was 3/8". The whips were planted in late May, 1983, in soil that varied from sandy to silty. The word soil is used loosely because the entire area was under glaciers less than 300 years ago, and true soil horizons have yet to develop. In addition, the area is rising about an inch a year as the land is released from the weight of retreating glaciers about 20 miles away.

Survival rates for the six rootstocks were fairly constant for the first 2 years. My notes show little mortality due to lack of cold hardiness, although snow breakage was a problem especially with the Siberian crabapple and Malus 'Pepin Safran'. After three growing seasons I was confident that the Alaska rain forest could become a pomologist's playground.

Reality arrived the winter of '85-86, the trees' third winter. Temperatures in November bottomed out at -20°F, solidly and deeply freezing bare, saturated soil. Then came a balmy false spring in February that fooled even plants that should have known better. March followed with another session of -20°F, again freezing the soil several feet deeper than normal. The coup de grace was a freeze on June 12.

The only rootstock that passed the test winter with high marks was Siberian

crabapple. Only one seemingly healthy tree out of fifteen died. Survival rates for the other rootstocks are as follows:

Malus domestica 'Anis'-- 3 stocks-- 1 dead, 1 practically dead, 1 alive, My notes indicate that all three trees had grown vigorously and formed buds by September 1, the year before.

Malus 'Pepin Safran'--6 stocks-- all dead. This variety had previously shown excellent growth and survival.

Malus 'Ranetka'-- 6 stocks-- two died the winter of '84-85, and two died the winter of '85-86. Of all the rootstocks under evaluation, this variety seems the least adapted.

Malus 'Selkirk'-- 4 stocks-- two planted on heavy soils died after two years, and two planted in sandy soils survived even the test winter.

Malus 'Antonovka'-- 1 stock-- died before the test winter. A 3-4' tall 'Yellow Transparent' on 'Antonovka', planted in 1985 came through the test winter beautifully, while another one didn't.

The following rootstocks were planted in the same location in May, 1985. They had only one growing season to acclimate before the BIG CHILL:

Malus 'Robin'-- 4 stocks-- 2 died and 2 came through the winter fairly well.

Malus prunifolia-- 5 stocks-- all dead.

M7a-- 2 stocks-- all dead

M27--3 stocks-- all dead. They had grown beautifully their first season, and had formed buds by the beginning of September.

Grafted varieties that died after the test winter were: 'Summer Rose' on M7a; 'Yellow

Transparent' on 'Antonovka'; and 'Haugmann' on 'Ranetka'. Grafted varieties that survived are 'Yellow Transparent' on 'Antonovka' and 'Pomme Grise' on 'Selkirk'.

-Susan Brook

FRUIT SURVIVAL IN FAIRBANKS

The winter of 1985-86 was an unusual one for the Fairbanks area. At my home on Gilmore Trail (approx. 1000 ft elevation) temperatures did not fall below -25° F all winter. Despite these "mild" temperatures, the winter was rough on all perennials. Temperatures plummeted early in October before adequate snow had fallen, and the soil froze deeply very early. As winter progressed, the deep, insulating snows never materialized, thus jeopardizing the survival of most fruit crops.

Of the 4 cultivars of raspberries I planted, only the locally-bred, 'Kiska' (planted in 1983) survived with only slight cane tip injury. The cultivars 'Latham', 'Boyne' and 'Mammoth Red' (thornless) (all planted in 1985) suffered severe cane dieback, but the crowns all survived. All produced vigorous canes this past summer, and 'Boyne' began to flower late in August, but none produced fruit. The 'Latham' cultivar also showed severe damage from powdery mildew this past summer, the only cultivar to be affected.

The low snow cover also decimated nearly all of my strawberry plants except the old reliables: Sitka hybrids, 'Alaska Pioneer' and 'Toklat'. Among those killed included 'Cyclone', 'Guardian', 'Holiday', 'Delite', 'Viking', and 'Ogallala'. -P.S. Holloway

NATIONAL NAFEX MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

RENEWAL

NEW MEMBERSHIP

Some NAFEX memberships expire with this issue. Please check the expiration date after your name (on POMONA label). If it says the current month and year, renew now!

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP _____

\$6.00 per year, 2 yrs. \$10.00 in U.S.A. - - Canadian and other foreign: \$8.00 per year - 2 yrs. \$15.00. Payable in U.S. Funds. To keep the membership fees down, we are no longer sending out renewal notices. Send to - MARY KURLE, 10 S. 055 Madison Street. Hinsdale, IL 60521.

