

ALASKA NAFEX NEWSLETTER

MAY 1, 1986

Vol. 1, No 5

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

President: **Robert A. Purvis**, 5145 Whispering Spruce Drive, Anchorage, AK 99516. Ph. 345-7117 (h); 261-4113 (w).
Vice President: **Ed Swanson**, 3014 Columbia St., Anchorage, AK 99508. Ph. 277-0770 (h); 276-4727 (w).
Secretary: **Sharon Davies**, 1510 "P" St., Anchorage, AK 99501. Ph. 277-3764 (h).
Editor: **Pat Holloway**, SALRM, 301 O'Neill Building, Univ. of Alaska, Fairbanks, AK 99775-0100. Ph: 474-7433 (w)

MEETING DATES

May 8—Thurs. 7p.m. Lake Otis Elem Sch. Rm 7. Topics: Control of pests and diseases affecting fruit in Alaska; Julie Riley, Cooperative Extension Service, Speaker.

A pruning work party has been proposed, but no date has been set.

FRUIT SHORT COURSE REMINDER

May 13 and 15—Fruit culture in Alaska. Short course at Service HS, 7-9 p.m., by the Cooperative Extension Service and NAFEX members, Bob Purvis and Martha Black. For more information, contact Bob Purvis (see address above). —R.M. Purvis

SUMMARY OF APRIL MEETING

Ed Swanson opened the meeting that was attended by 12 members: Jay Dearborn, George Jenks, Lawrence Clark, Dorothy Emmons, Karl Franke, John Heald, Mike Zidek, Elmer Jeske, Steve Jacobson, John Loomis and Sharon Davies. Ed introduced a **new member, George Jenks**. Welcome, George!

Ed Swanson gave a brief introduction to grafting. An interesting historical note from the last national NAFEX news: it appears grafting was begun about 800 B.C. by the Greeks. It was more highly developed by monks during the middle ages.

Steve Jacobson demonstrated a whip graft and a chip bud graft. Steve uses a small wood plane rather than a knife for putting a smooth diagonally-cut plane on the rootstock and the scionwood for the whip graft. He has found that it works much more easily for him. It's worth trying! The rootstocks used were Malus 'Ranetka' and Malus baccata. The scionwood was 'Red June', 'Summered', 'Rescue', and 'Vista Bella'. The workshop participants each produced several grafted trees. We hope everyone will give us growth reports throughout the summer. After cleaning up the classroom, the participants dispersed about 9:15 p.m. after a successful workshop. —Sharon Davies

ANOTHER SOURCE OF FRUIT PLANTS FOR ALASKANS

DeArmoun Greenery, Inc. 3125 DeArmoun Road, Anchorage, AK 99516. (907)345-2654. Mailing address: P.O. Box 110788, Anchorage, AK 99511-0788.

Our apologies to R. Brock Shamburg, President of DeArmoun Greenery for omitting this address from previous newsletters. DeArmoun Greenery has long been a supporter of the Alaska Chapter, NAFEX, and they take pride in offering "the absolute best selection of trees and shrubs in Alaska, including specimen trees to four inches in diameter". They also have a couple of saskatoons in the twelve to fifteen-foot range this year. —PSH

RASPBERRIES

The first red raspberries were introduced into cultivation in Europe about 450 years ago. Early European cultivars were introduced into the United States before 1800. However, it was not until the introduction of 'Cuthbert' raspberry in 1865 that the raspberry became an important commercial and home garden fruit crop. The 'Cuthbert' cultivar was found as a chance seedling in what is now part of New York City. Its parentage is unknown, but it is believed to have resulted from a cross between the native North American red raspberry (*Rubus idaeus* var. *strigosus*) and a European cultivar, 'Hudson River Antwerp'. The 'Cuthbert' cultivar remained an important commercial cultivar in the U.S. until the 1940's when it was supplanted by more productive, more hardy cultivars. Today, it is not sold commercially.

'Cuthbert' was one of the first cultivars to be tested in Alaska. Charles C. Georgeson, researcher at the Sitka Experiment Station, first introduced cultivated raspberries to Alaska in 1898. Before 1897, Alaska wild raspberries were observed under cultivation in southeastern, AK gardens. The wild plants responded well to cultivation, but their yield and fruit size did not quite measure up to cultivated varieties.

Georgeson tested many cultivars of raspberries, and sent plants to homesteaders and miners throughout Alaska. It was the 'Cuthbert' raspberry that Georgeson used in crosses with *Rubus spectabilis* to form the Bensonberry (see NAFEX Newsletter, 1(3):2). For many years, the 'Cuthbert' was the most highly recommended cultivar in Alaska, although the canes winterkilled occasionally in the Matanuska and Tanana Valleys. The crowns usually survived.

Raspberry breeding in Alaska has been attempted at least 3 other times since Georgeson's first trials in the early 1900's. George Gasser and Jacob P. Anderson crossed 'Cuthbert' with Alaska wild raspberries in 1930, but all results have been lost.

In 1952, 'Cuthbert' again was crossed with a diversity of cultivars including 'Washington', 'Ruddy', 'Latham', 'Durham', 'Sunbeam', and 'Ranere', but all traces of this breeding program have been lost.

Most recently, Dr. Arvo Kallio established a breeding program at Fairbanks in the 1950's and 60's. Many seedlings from crosses between Alaska's wild raspberry and an unknown cultivar were grown at the Agricultural Experiment Station, and in 1977, one of these seedlings was officially released as the cultivar 'Kiska'. This cultivar has medium-sized, sweet fruit, and is productive, especially if mulched with compost or organic matter. Canes to eight feet in length are not uncommon. 'Kiska' produces weak, thin canes which can be a detriment when harvesting since the fruit hangs beneath the bent-over canes. This problem is solved, though if the canes are trained upright along a wire trellis. In the Fairbanks area, the easily bending canes are covered early by snowfall, giving a bit of winter protection. The snow-laden canes also are less noticed by moose who love to munch the succulent shoot tips and leaves. The 'Kiska' fruit occasionally is attacked by the raspberry fruit worm, but damage rarely is severe.

The growth habit of 'Kiska' is very different from 'Boyne', another popular interior, AK cultivar. 'Boyne' produces thick, stiff, upright and purplish canes that do not need trellising. The fruit of 'Boyne' is very large, dark red, and has a heavy wine-like flavor, as opposed to the light, sweet flavor of 'Kiska'. Some people prefer the flavor of 'Kiska' to 'Boyne' (but the moose love 'Boyne's nice, convenient, upright canes!).

Another favorite cultivar in interior, AK gardens is 'Latham' that produces fruit similar in size, shape and flavor to 'Kiska'. Golden raspberries, black raspberries and blackberries are not hardy in the Interior. The gold-fruited raspberries may survive for a few years, but even with reliable snow cover, they invariably weaken and die.

-P.S. Holloway

A VISIT WITH BOB PURVIS

As a compliment to his professional background in physics and astronomy, Alaska NAFEX President Bob Purvis grows fruit trees at his lower Hillside home on Whispering Spruce Drive, Anchorage. The southwest-facing slope receives sun all day which is a significant factor in the successful cultivation of his apple, plum and cherry trees.

Bob moved to Anchorage in 1975 after a 'hitch' in the Army at Ft. Greely (near Delta). Bob began experimenting in 1979. His first 4 trees--'Summerred' apples--died within 2 years. Bob is quick to comment that he didn't follow the proper cultural techniques. Had he wrapped the tree trunks with burlap, they would not have been sunscalded; they would have been insulated and protected from rabbit damage. Had he planted his Malling 26 rootstock on mounds instead of in a poorly-drained depression, this unreliably winter-hardy stock might have survived.

In the spring of 1983, Bob planted one 'Wealthy' and one 'Red Duchess' tree that had survived 3 winters at Country Gardens Nursery before Bob transplanted them. The trees yielded 2 apples in 1984 and 9 in 1985. Bob's 'North Star' dwarf pie cherry trees, planted in June 1984, yielded 150 cherries last summer (enough for a scrumptious pie shared with Bob's wife, Connie, who's counting on 2 pies this summer). A 'Norland' (Canadian) apple planted last summer blossomed during that season. Bob also planted 'Toka' and 'Superior' plums last summer. The 'Toka' is a good pollinizer for the other American hybrid plum varieties, so he expects blooms this summer.

To deter browsing moose, Bob built 6- to 8-foot-tall cages of 2x2's and chicken wire for his trees, but the cages occasionally toppled in the high winds characteristic of the Hillside area. Alaska Mill and Feed's red plastic mesh onion bags tied around the new growth and secured with the drawstring have proven to be an effective alternative...that is, until the wind starts blowing... Bob

comments that it's more practical to collect and replace the bags on the new growth after a big (25 mph) wind than it is to redesign the cages.

Other damage is caused by thrips which eat the blooms (including the reproductive parts) and the foliage. Bob recommends that a dormant oil spray be applied in May. He also recommends spraying a fungicide on leaves to inhibit shot-hole fungus, which leaves tiny holes in the leaves but doesn't affect blossoms or fruit. Moose browse and sunscald rank as the nemesis of local fruit growers who must be prepared to invest considerably more effort in damage prevention than growers in the lower 48.

Bob comments that ideal local growing conditions include soil that is well-drained, with humus and small quantities of sand and clay. Although the peat soil of Midtown poses growing problems, Spenard, south Anchorage and downtown probably offer the best soils, with Mountain View another possibility. Bob notes that the potential for growing cherry, plum, apple and pear trees in the local area and other parts of Alaska is barely tapped.

Bob co-founded the Alaska chapter of NAFEX (along with Rich Raynor) in 1985. Bob is keen on learning the names/ addresses of growers around Alaska. So far he has had responses from Ketchikan to Fairbanks.

A resource person at heart, Bob enjoys recommending his successes and helping growers get started. He is co-teaching several classes on fruit growing with Martha Black, Master Gardener. These classes are being offered through the Community Schools "Community Cache" program. These classes provide a splendid opportunity to met this enthusiastic grower and pick up some tips on successfully growing fruit trees in Alaska.

-C. Ryan

A white currant is simply a red currant with white fruit. Not so with the black currant, which is a totally different species. Black currants are less winter hardy than red or whites.
