ALASKA NAFEX NEWSLETTER

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MEETING DATES


Apr. 9. Thurs. 7 p.m. Anch. Christian Ctr. Auditorium. Grafting workshop. Slide show, apples in Fairbanks; Bob Purvis, speaker.


Early May—Pruning party. Place and time to be announced.

FINAL NOTICE—DUES FOR 1987

DON'T FORGET! The 1987 dues of $7.00 are still payable this month. Please send your check to Bob Purvis at the above address before the March Newsletter is printed.

APRICOTS SUBJECT OF DECEMBER MEETING

At the December Meeting, NAFEX member Lawrence Clark, one of the few Anchorage residents who owns a bearing apricot tree, discussed his experiences with this tree fruit in South Anchorage.

Apricots are one of about 200 species of stone fruits, most of which are native to the North Temperate Zone. The commercial varieties, believed to have originated in China, were under cultivation as much as 4000 years ago. Today, most of the apricots grown commercially in the U.S. are grown on the West Coast, with 95% of the production in California and the remainder mostly in Oregon and Washington. "Cots" thrive mostly where peaches do, but there are Canadian varieties (i.e. cv. Sunrise) that have survived and borne fruit for 30 years in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan (lat. 52°00'N).

Lawrence grows an apricot that is native of Manchuria, a province in northern China. Rainfall in Manchuria ranges from 12 to 40 inches and the growing season is 150-200 days. Temperatures occasionally dip to -30°F in January, but the average is 21°F. In summer, the average high is 70°F in the North and 80°F in the South.

The white or pink apricot blossoms appear before they leaf out in spring. They do not require a special soil, although it should be well-drained. It grows best when any sod is removed around the base of the plant so the soil will be warm. After the trees are 2 years old, Lawrence recommends spreading 2-3 lb of calcium nitrate fertilizer around the drip line in Spring. New growth should be pruned slightly the following spring to stimulate more new growth.

Lawrence's Manchurian apricot began to bloom about the 4th or 5th year, and it
blossoms between May 15 and 27. The trees bear on one-year-old and older wood. The fruit has a short stem, is smooth, and is yellowish with a red tinge. Also, because of a tendency to biennial bearing, it is probably a good idea to thin the fruit. The fruit is nearly ripe when harvested in late September, and as such is better for preserves than for dessert.

The tree has no problems with leaf rollers or with other insect pests. Like most apricots, it is self fertile. The tree grows vigorously and is spreading in habit. Currently it is about 10–12 ft in height.

Other varieties being tested in the Anchorage area include ‘Scout’, ‘Moongold’ and ‘Sungold’. So far these varieties grown by Rich Raynor have exhibited little winter dieback.

L. Clark.

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**GROWING RASPBERRIES IN FAIRBANKS**

Few fruits are more hardy and reliably productive as the raspberry in Interior, Alaska gardens. I have been growing raspberries for 10 years in the Fairbanks area and have never had a crop failure. They certainly warrant more attention from serious home gardeners as well as commercial producers.

Raspberries are just one of a group of fruits called brambles which also includes blackberries, loganberries, wineberries and salmonberries. Raspberries also come in a variety of fruit colors including yellow, purple and black. The black raspberry or black cap is native of North America and is classified as Rubus occidentalis. I have heard of several people attempting black cap culture in the Fairbanks area, but none have succeeded. The purple raspberry is a hybrid between the black and red raspberries and is classified as Rubus neglectus. It, too, is not hardy in the Fairbanks area. Yellow raspberries are red raspberries, Rubus idaeus, but with amber-colored fruit. I have seen yellow raspberries, especially the cultivar ‘Fallgold’ growing in Fairbanks, but they are invariably short-lived and not nearly as productive as the hardy red raspberries. Several years ago, yellow raspberries were grown at the Ag Experiment Station in Fairbanks (approx 450 ft elevation). They produced fruit, but gradually died out. In my own garden (1000 ft elevation), ‘Fallgold’ survived for 4 years but did not produce any fruit.

Of all the brambles, then, the only one suited to Interior gardens is the red raspberry. Many gardeners have simply domesticated our wild red raspberry which responds well to cultivation, but the size, flavor and quality of the fruit makes the wild berry a poor second to the hardy cultivars. Several cultivars of red raspberries have been tested in the Fairbanks area, but by far the most successful has been ‘Kiska’, a cultivar developed by Dr. Arvo Kallio at the Experiment Station in Fairbanks. Other cultivars such as ‘Latham’, ‘Boyne’, ‘Cuthbert’, ‘Chief’, and ‘Sunbeam’ have been grown with varying degrees of success. In open, exposed fields, all of these cultivars require mulching of the canes with straw, snow, soil, etc. to ensure winter survival. Not so with the ‘Kiska’ cultivar which has survived without mulching in both the lowlands and hills for many years with only a small amount of cane tip dieback.

Red raspberries also may be classified according to fruiting season: the fall bearing and summer bearing cultivars. The summer bearing cultivars such as the ones listed above produce non-bearing primocanes during the first year of growth. (Don't make the mistake that a local gardener did, assume that the plants are no good, and dig them out because they did not produce fruit the first year!) During the second year, these primocanes become floricanes— they flower, produce fruit, then die. At the same time that these floricanes are bearing fruit, new primocanes are also being produced for fruit production the next season. Thus, after the first year, fruiting is continuous.

In fall bearing raspberries, on the other hand, the primocanes become floricanes at the end of the first season and begin to bear
fruit on the cane tips in autumn. During the second year, these frigoricanes continue to produce more fruit in mid summer, and then they die. At the same time, new primocanes grow which bear a second crop in autumn. Now the idea of an "everbearing" raspberry sounds great--more fruit over a longer period of time. If we lived in the "lower 48", in areas with a very long, warm autumn season, this characteristic would, indeed be an advantage. However, because of our short growing season and practically non-existent autumn, these fall bearing cultivars such as 'Heritage' and 'Fall Red' tend to be less productive than the summer bearing ones.

Growing 'Kiska' raspberries. My raspberries are growing on well drained, deep, Fairbanks silt loam soil on a SE-facing slope. Plants leaf out during the last week of May and produce a continuous supply of fruit from mid July until frost. My fruiting season is a week or two later and much more prolonged than at lower elevations in the Fairbanks area because of cooler temperatures and slightly more rainfall. The soils are well adapted to raspberry production, having a pH of 6.0 (optimum is from about 5.5 to 7.5) and good moisture holding capacity. Trickle irrigation using Chapin Twinwall hose has improved fruit size, but is not necessary for a bumper crop. A fellow gardener who grows raspberries on lighter, sandier soils near Fairbanks has found irrigation, especially in July, to be beneficial in improving both fruit size and quantity.

Before I planted my first raspberries I clean cultivated the site one year prior to planting to try to reduce perennial weeds, especially quackgrass. Perennial grasses are difficult to control without herbicides after raspberries are established. Also, before planting, I incorporated compost (approx 1 lb per sq ft) into the soil to improve overall fertility. No other practice I have ever done has improved plant growth more than this incorporation of organic matter. I follow up every year with liberal side dressings of compost which is worked into the soil around the established crowns. In addition to compost, I broadcast, then work in 2 lb per 100 ft row of 8-32-16 each spring.

The original plants were spaced 2 1/2 ft apart in the row, and I use the hedgerow system of growing. I limit the lateral spread of each row by rototilling and clean cultivating along each side of the row leaving a row width of about 1 1/2 feet. After about 3 years the spaces between the plants are well filled with sucker plants, forming a continuous row.

One of the most time consuming, but absolutely necessary tasks in raspberry growing is pruning and thinning. Some people perform this task in the fall after the canes have gone dormant, but I prefer to wait until spring so I can prune out the effects of any winter injury and assess the damage done by moose. I first remove all the dead floricanes. These are easy to distinguish from the living primocanes. On 'Kiskas' they are dark brown to black with peeling bark and long lateral branches. Once those are removed, I thin the remaining canes to 8 per foot of row, always choosing the healthiest, fattest canes over the more spindly ones. If you don't perform this essential task, you very rapidly end up with a thick, unmanageable patch of live and dead canes which makes harvesting very difficult.

'Kiska' raspberries have relatively thin canes when compared to other cultivars like 'Boyne'. Under optimum fertility and moisture it is easy to get 6-8 ft of growth each season. These canes tend to bend outward and downward making harvesting more difficult. Because of this growth habit, I grow these raspberries on a wire trellis. I have 5 ft steel fenceposts spaced 12 ft apart in the row with a double strand of wire running the length of the row on each side of the posts and 4 ft high. After cane thinning, the fruiting canes are pruned to a 5 ft height and placed between the wires. The wires are then tied together with Twist 'ems to prevent the canes from falling out. This method is time consuming, but it makes harvesting easier; you can have closer spacings between rows; and it keeps the fruit from getting dirty as the canes bend to the ground. I have
seen many other gardeners in the Fairbanks area who do not use trellises. They simply prune their canes to about 4 ft height or let moose browse them to the snow line. Many gardeners do not prune the tops of the canes, thinking that they are cutting off too many potential fruits. However, the cane tip is one of the least productive portions of a raspberry cane, and what you lose in quantity you gain in greater fruit size and quality.

I have had very few pest problems with raspberries. Weeds are probably the biggest headache, but with my relatively small area, the cultivation before planting plus hand weeding is sufficient. Simazine and Casoron have been used successfully in established plantings, but be sure to check with the local Extension Agent to determine the current status of these herbicides in Alaska.

I have heard numerous complaints from growers, especially in Southcentral about powdery mildew on raspberries. I have never seen this mildew on 'Kiska's in my garden, but last summer all my 'Latham's were very severely affected. Occasionally I hear about mildew and gray mold on the fruit which makes the fruit unusable. Neither disease has been a problem on any of the raspberries I have grown.

Only one insect pest is of significance to raspberry growers—the raspberry fruitworm. The adult is a beetle that feeds on fruit buds and leaves, sometimes destroying the blossoms. These beetles lay eggs on buds or stems and upon hatching, the larvae make their way into the developing fruit where they feed, mostly on the central white core. Infested fruits often crumble apart when harvested. Mature larvae drop to the ground, pupate in the soil, and emerge as adults the following spring. I have never seen these fruitworms in very large populations, but they do attack 'Kiska'. In home gardens, the easiest way to deal with them is to ignore the larvae. After the fruit is harvested, soak them in water and the occasional larva will float to the surface and can be skimmed away from the fruit. Commercially, it is not that desirable to sell wormy fruit to customers. Rotenone may be used to kill adult beetles before they lay eggs. Three treatments are applied starting shortly after the first blossom opens, then at 7–10 day intervals thereafter. Follow label directions for further information.  

-P. Holloway