



**JUST PEACHY!**

# Growing Florida stone fruit as an alternative to citrus production

**By Mercy Olmstead and Robert Rouse**

**T**he Florida citrus industry has had its challenges within the past decade with citrus greening, bacterial canker, and more recently, citrus black spot. Although some growers will undoubtedly take this opportunity to remove citrus trees, sell land and move on with an alternative career, for most growers, farming is a livelihood not easily released from their daily lives. Thus, alternative crops become more attractive to continue farming that will lead to economic sustainability for their families and enterprises.

The University of Florida Stone Fruit Breeding and Research program has been breeding low-chill stone fruit and conducting research for more than 50 years. Many of the varieties have been successfully grown in subtropical areas around the world, including Australia, Morocco and Spain.

In Florida, a significant stone fruit industry existed in north Central

Florida with approximately 4,000 acres at the height of the industry. The freezes of the 1980s significantly decreased this acreage due to crop losses resulting from spring frosts. In the past 15 years, a shift in the breeding program to non-melting flesh has renewed interest within the state to increase acreages and renew the Florida stone fruit industry.

Why consider peach production as a medium-term option for citrus? In Florida, a novel marketing window exists in which to sell stone fruit for significantly more per pound than our other southeastern United States counterparts such as Georgia and South Carolina. The subtropical climate in central and southern Florida coupled with low-chill peach varieties results in a harvest window where no other country or state is able to produce ripe peaches and nectarines. The harvest window for the current varieties available ranges from early April to mid-May, a time of the year in which Chile and Argentina have stopped exporting stone fruit to the United States.

The ability to produce ripe peaches and nectarines during a time when no other state or country can provides a distinct pricing advantage. Growers who are able to get their fruit in early April have an opportunity to get the highest price, while fruit that hits the market in mid-May nor-

mally will have to compete with the first wave of peaches from California and Georgia. In the past five years, prices have ranged from approximately \$1.25 per pound to more than \$2 per pound — five to 10 times greater than prices for growers in Georgia and South Carolina.

There are two types of peaches with which consumers are familiar: fresh market or melting flesh peaches, and canning or non-melting flesh peaches. Many buyers know that peaches and nectarines, if harvested “tree-ripe,” cannot be transported long distances and do not have a very long shelf life if the variety is a melting flesh-type. However, non-melting flesh peaches are able to withstand the rigors of harvesting, transportation and marketing with firmer flesh, resulting in excellent eating quality. The varieties that have been released by the UF Stone Fruit Breeding Program also have excellent flavor, a key quality in keeping consumers coming back for return purchases.

There are several varieties that have been developed for lower-chill production areas in Central Florida and south Central Florida. When choosing a variety, it is essential to match your variety to your site and to stagger varieties with a range of fruit developmental periods (FDP; the time span between full bloom and harvest) to ensure a steady stream of fruit is being provided to buyers.

## **UFSun – (patented)**

This non-melting peach variety, released in 2004, has a chill unit requirement of 100 to 150 chill units and a fruit developmental period (FDP) of 80 days. When properly thinned (6 to 8 inches between fruit), UFSun fruit size is large, very firm with yellow flesh, which is clingstone. Fruit are uniform and substantially symmetrical with 50 percent to 60 percent red skin and darker red stripes over the entire fruit. Total yield for this variety can be large, given its early ripening window. The trees can be vigorous and spreading, so proper spacing must be established in a young orchard to avoid cross-row shading.

## **UFOne – (patented)**

Released in 2008, UFOne is a non-melting flesh peach variety with a chill unit requirement of 100 to 150 chill units and a FDP of 95 days. UFOne



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**UFOne**

trees bear heavy loads of early-mid season fruit with medium large size, with very firm yellow flesh that is clingstone. Fruit also have an attractive red blush over 40 percent of the skin, which is enhanced with exposure to sunlight. The trees are moderately vigorous with a semi-spreading habit and are of medium size, making it a good candidate for higher-density plantings. Caution should be observed where night temperatures do not reach the mid-50s (°F; 12-14°C) during bloom, as this will have a negative impact on fruit set.

**TropicBeauty – (not patented)**

TropicBeauty trees require about 150 chill units, fruit ripens at the end of April (FDP of 89 days) and holds on



**TropicBeauty**

the tree better than most other cultivars. Fruit have a high percentage of red blush on a bright-yellow background with very short fuzz, making the fruit highly attractive. The round, firm fruit have melting, deep-yellow flesh that frees from the pit at soft ripe. Fruit size is about 2.25 to 2.6 inches (5.7 cm to 6.4 cm) in diameter. TropicBeauty has been a worldwide standard for low-chill melting flesh peaches, along with Flordaprince; however, TropicBeauty has firmer flesh than Flordaprince, which allows fruit to be shipped greater distances.

**UFBeauty – (patented)**

UFBeauty is a patented variety released in 2002, requiring 200 chill



**UFBeauty**

units and has an 82-day FDP. This variety is well-suited to Central Florida, north of the I-4 corridor where there is higher chill unit accumulation. Trees bear large, heavy crops of large fruit (average size = 2.5 inches), and are very firm with a yellow, non-melting flesh that is clingstone. Fruit have 90 percent to 100 percent red blush, with darker red stripes, coupled with excellent flavor and eating quality. The growth habit of UFBeauty is large, with a semi-spreading growth.

**UFGold – (patented)**

UFGold is the first of a series of non-melting flesh cultivars that can fully ripen on the tree for maximum flavor and yet have the desirable

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qualities of low-chill melting flesh cultivars of good taste and great external appeal (more firmness and longer shelf life). Trees require about 200 chill units with fruit ripening in late April (80-day FDP). Fruit are 2.5 inches (5.7 cm) in diameter and larger. The cultivar UFGold has a fruit set problem when experiencing high night temperatures during bloom. Cultivar UFGold has been replaced with UFSun.

Additional varieties suitable for commercial production to consider for those wanting to do U-pick operations or target farmers markets are Flordaprince, Flordaglo and TropicSnow.

Flordaprince trees require about 150 chill units and fruit ripen in mid-April. Fruit are attractive, having a bright-red blush over a yellow background. Yellow flesh is semi-clingstone when fully mature. Fruit have highly aromatic flavor giving them an excellent taste and are consistently 2.0 inches (5.0 cm) or larger when properly thinned.

Flordaglo is a white-flesh peach requiring about 150 chill units. Fruit have high red blush on melting white flesh with a semi-clingstone nature. Fruit size is 2.25 – 2.5 inches (5.7 - 6.4 cm) in diameter and it ripens late April to early May.

TropicSnow fruit are white-fleshed, freestone, and trees require about 175 chill units. Taste is tart but sweet, and aromatic. Fruit are large for the season at 2.5 inches (5.7 cm) or larger in diameter and ripen early May to mid-May.

Whether you are targeting multi-state distribution of Florida peaches or local distribution, our unique climate throughout the state makes this alternative crop attractive. Although disease and pest pressure is greater for stone fruit than for citrus, proper implementation of integrated pest management programs alleviates many of these problems, allowing growers to realize a healthy profit. Check out the UF Stone Fruit Web site at <http://hos.ufl.edu/stonefruit> for more information.

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## Get the Juicy Scoop from Florida Grapefruit



*By Ken Keck*

**F**lorida Department of Citrus is harnessing the power of word-of-mouth marketing to recruit new fans of Florida grapefruit. As we seek to grow the grapefruit market among young women ages 25 to 44 years old, we must align grapefruit with their lifestyle needs and communicate through relevant channels.

Our target of “well-being” women is interested in health and wellness, fitness, beauty and taste. They are influential thought leaders who use social media to communicate among their friends and acquaintances.

We created the Juicy Scoop page on Facebook to facilitate an interactive dialogue with “well-being” women about grapefruit and to establish a central location to share the latest tips. Once tips are posted, Facebook shares this information with each woman’s friends and delivers a personal recommendation to visit the Juicy Scoop. Please check it out for yourself at [www.facebook.com/juicyscoop](http://www.facebook.com/juicyscoop).

You may recall Frank, the flippant flamingo, from our previous grapefruit print campaigns. Frank has his own page on the Juicy Scoop to promote his love of grapefruit and to share his spunky perspective on everyday challenges.

FDOC will support the launch of the Juicy Scoop and drive traffic through advertising on Facebook. In addition to traditional banner ads, we’ll engage users through interactive applications designed to convert them to Juicy Scoop fans.

To extend our messages beyond Facebook, FDOC will post Juicy Scoop comments on Twitter, giving “well-being” women another popular social media platform to share Florida grapefruit with their friends.

We’ll also be taking Florida grapefruit to the streets to encourage well-being women to discover, or rediscover, Florida grapefruit.

In Atlanta, Boston, Philadelphia and Miami, we will host the Juicy Scoop Experience in major malls to show “well-being” women how Florida grapefruit supports health and beauty while delivering refreshing taste. The live Juicy Scoop experience will be shared via Facebook so that women everywhere can participate.

As our target consumers head to the gym to stay fit in the new year, we will showcase Florida grapefruit messages on super-sized advertising panels in nearly 700 health clubs. A majority of gym visitors stop at a grocery store following their workout, and we’ll deliver a coupon for \$1 off fresh grapefruit or grapefruit juice to drive purchases.

In New York City grocery stores near the health clubs, “well-being” women who buy fresh grapefruit or grapefruit juice will receive a coupon good toward their next purchase.

We’ll reach 11 million “well-being” women with Florida grapefruit messages as they use mobile phone applications to plan their grocery lists.

FDOC will offer free grapefruit spoons with purchase through bag stuffers inside fresh grapefruit, on our Web sites and at Florida Welcome Centers.

Combined public relations and promotional efforts are anticipated to generate nearly 250 million positive consumer impressions for Florida grapefruit and drive purchases during the key grapefruit season. As Frank might say, “That’s a juicy return on growers’ investment.”

***The mission of the Florida Department of Citrus is to grow the market for the Florida citrus industry to enhance the economic well-being of the Florida citrus grower, citrus industry and the state of Florida.***

***Ken Keck, Executive Director, can be reached at 863-537-3999.***

***For more information, visit [www.FDOCgrower.com](http://www.FDOCgrower.com)***



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