Annual Christmas Party

The Departmental Christmas party will be on Sunday, December 11, from 4-8 p.m. at Country Lanes (go west out of town for about 4 miles—it will be on your left; if you go down a hill, you have gone too far).

Following is the schedule of events:
Bowling 4-6
Dinner 6-7
Santa 7-7:30
Cleanup 7:30-8

Please bring one of the following to share: Hors d’oeuvres, a vegetable or potato dish, salad or dessert. The meat, rolls, and drinks (non-alcoholic) will be provided. Please join us for any or all of the above.

Farmer-to-Farmer Assignment in Nicaragua – October 16th-29th

By David Baumbauer

The Farmer-to-Farmer program is a US-AID project to provide volunteer technical assistance to farmers in rural, underdeveloped areas. My assignment to Nicaragua was organized by Winrock International, a Little Rock, Arkansas based NGO. The host organization that requested a greenhouse specialist was Catholic Relief Services (CRS), a U.S. based organization that works in underdeveloped countries to improve agriculture, health, social justice and micro-finance situations in rural areas. I was assigned to the Estelí office, which serves 5000 farmers in the Estelí, Matagalpa, and Jinotega departments. The principal crops are coffee, cattle, tobacco and vegetables. This is a mountainous, timbered area located in the north-central part of Nicaragua.

Greenhouses on the La Dalia Farm

I spent three days bouncing around in a pickup truck visiting farmers that had constructed high tunnels or greenhouses. Nicaragua has two seasons, the rainy season lasts from June through December and the dry season from January through May. The primary reason for greenhouse production in this area is to manage water and provide some degree of protection from soil and foliage diseases associated with saturated soils and wet foliage. Many of the farmers were very progressive despite having very limited resources. One produced his own beneficial insects for cabbage moth control, and several produced vermicompost. Modern hybrids were being used, including white fly resistant tomatoes from Israel. The farmers were all interested in producing produce for export to the United States. I delivered two workshops on greenhouse design and management for CRS technicians and farmers during my second week. It was a very interesting experience translating PowerPoint presentations into Spanish. CRS supplied a translator for my
visit and Irving Castro became a quick friend and a
great tour guide.

Nicaragua is a budget travelers dream as it is
possible to live very comfortably on $20 per day.
Tourism is a fledgling industry in Nicaragua, but
you will find a warm welcome if you chose to tour
the countryside. The landscape is dominated by
volcanoes, lakes and rain and cloud forests.

Estelí makes a great base camp for exploring the
northern region of Nicaragua. It is also a good
place to improve your Spanish, as there are several
Spanish language camps in town. Miraflor is the
fledgling national park located 30 km north of town.

If this type of travel appeals to you, log on to
www.winrock.org and see what short term
assignments are available. You volunteer your
time, and the organizations cover all your expenses.
If you have any questions stop by the PGC office
for a visit and a cup of Nicaraguan coffee.

Lance Stott Receives Award
Lance Stott has been awarded the Western
Transportation Institute Graduate Transportation
Research Assistantship. The assistantship will pay
his tuition and fees and a stipend. Lance will be
studying Development of California Native Grass Sod for Sensitive Highway Site Stabilization

Grants
Phil Bruckner, “Accelerated development of two
gene imidazolinone tolerant wheat varieties for
Montana”, Montana Board of Research and
Commercialization.

Luther Talbert, “Accelerated development of two
gene imidazolinone tolerant wheat varieties for
Montana”, Montana Board of Research and
Commercialization.

Cathy Cripps and Kate Mohatt, “Enhanced
Laboratory Learning with Instructional Protocols
for Safe Molecular Technology to fit PSPP
Departmental Needs”, 2005-6 Instructional
Innovation Grant.

Andreas Fischer, “Functional Analysis of Plant
Nitrogen Recycling”, US Cooperative State
Research

Publications
James “Mick” A. Mickelson (Pioneer Hi-Bred
International, Inc.) and Bill Grey, “Effect of soil
water content on wild oat (Avena fatua) seed
mortality and seedling emergence”. Weed Science
(in press).

New Employees
Yerlan Turuspekov – Mike Giroux/Tom Blake –
124 ABS

I am from
Kazakhstan, which is
a part of Central
Asia. In 1986, I
graduated from the
Biology Department
of Kazakhstan State
University. In 1992, I
defended my Ph.D.
thesis in plant
genetics. The Ph.D.
work was related to
the genetic diversity and inheritance of isozymes in
barley. Since 1994, I have been working at the
Institute of Plant Physiology, Genetics and
Bioengineering, which is a part of the Biotechnology
Center of Kazakhstan. I am very excited to work
with the outstanding scientists in the Plant Sciences
and Plant Pathology Department of MSU. I hope to
get good experience in genetics of grain quality of
cereals and use this knowledge back in Kazakhstan.
I am married and have two sons.
drive is longer than a quarter hour, wrap the tree in a tarp to protect it, or transport it in an enclosed vehicle such as a moving trailer.

If you cannot display the tree immediately, store it in a bucket of water in a dark, cool, humid (33-50 F; 85-90% relative humidity), place well-ventilated and free of drafts. Don’t leave a fresh tree in the sun.

Make a fresh cut on the butt of the tree before you place it into the water. Re-cut it before storage and again before placing it in the stand in the living room.

When you re-cut the butt be sure to make the cut square across the bottom. Do not make slanting cuts, which will give you headaches in keeping the tree plumb in the stand. Such cuts do not substantially increase the water uptake of the tree.

Be sure the tree stand is large enough to hold the tree and sufficient water. Using too small a container is one of the biggest mistakes we make.

Do not whittle the butt of the tree or otherwise bruise the end of the tree. That removes or damages much of the new xylem, which is that part of the trunk responsible for most of the water uptake.

Drilling a hole in the butt of the tree does not increase water uptake.

Fill the stand with clean, cool water. Many of the old ideas about using floral preservatives, hot water, sugar, molasses, water-holding gels, a penny, bleach, and soda pop in the stand recently have been shown to provide no benefit to the tree whatsoever and some may actually shorten the tree’s display time. So, don’t bother to use them. Just use clean, cool water and DON’T let the container dry out.

Most trees will use about a quart of water per day. For example, a 6-foot Fraser fir may use 4 quarts per day during the first week, then 2-3 quarts per day for the next 3-4 weeks. Of course the amount of water used depends upon the species and upon the room conditions.

If your tree uses a good amount of water at a steady rate, it is probably remaining hydrated and will have a long display life. If water use slacks off rapidly after a week or so, the water uptake mechanism has been impeded, and the tree is drying out. There is little you can do about it at that point.

Fire safety is on everyone’s mind, and a dry tree is a real fire hazard. Don’t display trees near stoves or radiators and be sure lighting wires are not frayed. Use flame-retardants only if required by law.

Green colorants are cosmetic only. Better to use a fresh green tree.

The benefit of needle stickers, which dry to a clear gloss and cause the needles to stick to the tree for long periods of time, has not been borne out by scientific tests. Don’t bother with them.

Antitranspirants do little to prevent the tree from drying unless they are put on in very high amounts, to the point that the tree becomes sticky. Don’t bother with them either.

We all know that some species of trees last longer than others. Of course there are many variables involved, such as room temperature, how the tree was handled in storage, shipping, etc., but in general, you can expect Nordmann Fir, Fraser Fir, and Noble Fir to last 4-6 weeks on display; Balsam Fir, Grand Fir, Korean Fir, Douglas Fir, Eastern White Pine, Western White Pine, and Colorado Blue Spruce to last 4-5 weeks, and Scotch Pine, Norway Spruce, and White Spruce to last about 3-4 weeks. The worst keepers are Eastern Red Cedar, at 10 days to 3 weeks, and Atlantic White cedar at 7-10 days.

Have a safe and happy holiday season.

Favorite Christmas Recipes
Roasted Beets with Oranges and Basil – Robyn Klein
2 or 3 beets, cut into eighths
1 large carrot, cut into rounds
3-4 Tablespoons virgin olive oil
1-2 oranges (sectioned)
grated rind from the oranges
2 Tablespoons balsamic vinegar
3 Tablespoons chopped basil
Salt and pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Place beets on roasting pan and dribble 1 Tablespoon of the olive oil over them. Season with salt and pepper. Bake for 35-40 minutes (check with fork for tenderness). Remove from oven.

In a bowl, combine grated orange rind, orange sections, balsamic vinegar and basil. Whisking constantly, drizzle in the remaining olive oil. Add salt and pepper. Place beets and oranges on large plate and drizzle the liquid mixture over them. Dress with basil leaves. Serve hot or cold.
Variation: Substitute 2 Tablespoons of truffle oil for the olive oil.

Of the following two recipes, one takes eggs whites and the other egg yolks.

Cinnamon Stars (Zimtsterne) – Mareike Johnston
3 egg whites
3 cups conf. sugar
3 cups unblanched grated almonds (I prefer ground hazelnuts)
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 tablespoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon mace (optional)

1. Beat the egg whites until stiff.
2. Beat in the confectioners’ sugar, 2 tablespoons at a time. The mixture should be stiff and glossy. Reserve 1 cup of the mixture for icing.
3. Beat the almonds, lemon juice, cinnamon and mace into the remaining egg-white mixture. Let it stand for 30 minutes to 1 hour; it should dry out and be firm.
4. Sprinkle a cutting board with sugar (or ground nuts).
5. Carefully roll out the dough to the thickness of 1/2 to 3/4 inch. If the dough sticks, sprinkle more sugar (ground nuts) on the cutting board.
6. Cut out the dough with star-shaped cookie cutters.
7. Paint each cookie carefully and neatly with the remaining egg white mixture.
8. Place the cookies on a buttered and floured (or use parchment paper) cookie sheet.
9. Bake in a preheated slow oven (275) for about 15 minutes or until set.

Tip:
The icing must remain white.

Lemon Hearts (Zitronenherzen) – Mareike Johnston
3 egg yolks
2/3 c sugar
1 tb vanilla
2 to 2-1/2 cups ground almonds
1/8 ts lemon extract
1/8 ts Baking powder

Lemon icing:
1 c Powdered sugar, sifted
1 tb To 1-1/2 t lemon juice

Beat egg yolks, 2/3 cup sugar and vanilla until thick and lemon colored. Stir in half the finely ground almonds, lemon extract, baking powder. Transfer dough to well sugared surface. Knead in remaining almonds to form soft dough.

Shape into ball. Refrigerate about 1-1/2 hrs. Heat oven to 400. Line baking sheet with greased wax paper. Sprinkle a cutting board with sugar (or ground nuts).

Roll dough 1/4 in thick. Cut out heart shaped cookies. Bake until edges are golden 8-10 min.

Cookies burn easily!!!!!
Spread icing on warm cookies.

Chocolate Pecan Pie – Bobby Bear
This recipe is made with a food processor.
Crust:
1 1/3 cups unbleached flour
1/2 t salt
1 T sugar
1 stick unsalted butter
1/2 t lemon juice
3 1/2 T ice water

Filling:
5 oz good quality bittersweet chocolate such as Tobler or Lindt, broken into pieces
1 cup plus 2 T sugar
1 stick unsalted butter
1 cup light corn syrup
4 large eggs
2 cups pecan halves
1/4 cup dark crème de cacao
1/2 cup heavy whipping cream, whipped

Process flour salt, sugar and butter with metal blade of food processor until mixture resembles course meal. Combine lemon juice, water and with motor running, pour liquid through feed tube until mixture begins to form a ball. The dough can be used immediately or shaped into a disc and stored, tightly wrapped in the refrigerator until ready to use.

Roll out dough into a 14 inch circle. Put into 9” pie pan, crimp edge and refrigerate 20 minutes. Preheat oven to 425, line pastry with aluminum foil and fill with metal pie weights or uncooked dry beans. Bake for 10 minutes until the shell is just set, but not brown. Prepare filling while shell is baking.

Melt the butter in the corn syrup in a small saucepan over moderate heat. Pulse the sugar and chocolate together until it resembles a coarse meal. Slowly pour the butter mixture through the feed tube with the motor running and process until the chocolate is completely melted, about 20 seconds, stopping once to scrape down the work bowl.

Add the eggs, pecans and crème de cacao and pulse 6 times or just until the eggs are incorporated. The pecans should still be in fairly large pieces.

When the shell is partially cooked, remove it from the oven leaving the baking sheet in place and remove the aluminum foil. Reduce the oven temp to 350. Pour the coco pecan mixture into the warm pastry shell. Place the pie on the baking sheet and bake for 1 hour at 350. Cover the edge of the crust with foil if it starts browning too much. Cool to room temperature and garnish with whipped cream.

Coal pudding - David Sands
Some of us get this, not bad if flavored with camellina meal.

December Birthdays
Ted Clack 3
Fletcher Meyer 4
Bill Grey 4
Kate Mohatt 5
Nancy Blake 6
Jack Meyer 19
Cathy Seibert 21
Elena Kalinina 21
Cheryl Moore-Gough 23
John Ansley 23
Sue Brumfield 26
Tim Seipel 28
Lucy Cooke 30

Quote of the Month
“Until one feels the spirit of Christmas, there is no Christmas. All else is outward display—so much tinsel and decorations. For it isn’t the holly, it isn’t the snow. It isn’t the tree or the firelight’s glow. It’s the warmth that comes to the hearts of men when the Christmas spirit returns again.”
-Unknown

Once again, it has been great working for all of you this year. We wish each of you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Bobby, Melody, Elaine and Irene