Week of January 7, 2001

 **Fruit Growing for the Cheapskate**

 Willie Chance

 My wife has been reading ‘How to Pinch a Penny Until It Screams’. We already practice some of the book’s ideas. Others are not practical for us since they involve too much time or effort.

 In the same sense, you can grow fruits very economically. It just takes more work and time.

 In most cases I would recommend just buying fruit plants. You will get a crop more quickly and time is valuable. On the other hand, some fruits are so easy to propagate, it seems a shame not to do so. You can increase the size of your orchard or give the plants to neighbors.

 First, here are the basics. Some fruits are difficult to grow. This is because they require constant spraying - perhaps every week or two. Do not plant peaches, apples or plums unless you plan to spray.

 Muscadine, strawberries and plums may or may not need spraying. The easiest fruits to grow are those that need few sprays - blueberries, blackberries, Oriental persimmons and pears. Get our brochure to know which varieties to plant. Pecans have many pests, but they are too large to spray. Plant them but do not expect a crop every year.

 Some fruits are hard to propagate. These fruits are generally grafted onto certain kinds of root stock. I do not recommend you try, but if you want to - call me for a brochure. These include peaches, apples, pears, pecans and some plums. Here is a partial list of easy to propagate fruits.

 Blackberries, blueberries and some plums often produce suckers (small plants sprouting up around the plant). Dig these up and move to new spots. This is best done in fall and winter but can be done at other times.

 You can also dig sections of blackberry root up that are four to eight inches long and the diameter of a pencil. Plant them horizontally in the ground in January or February about four inches deep. Do not ever let them dry out. They should produce new plants.

 You can ‘layer’ blackberries, figs and muscadine by pulling a branch to the ground, stripping the leaves off a short section and burying it under some soil. Leave the tip sticking out. Do this in July or August and roots should grow on the buried portion. Cut the new plant off once it is well rooted and move it.

 Figs and blueberries can also be propagated by hardwood cuttings. Take cuttings in January or February from last year’s growth. Make blueberry cuttings four inches long and fig cuttings eight inches long. Stick cuttings to one half or more their length into a well-drained, sandy soil or potting soil in a pot. Keep the soil moist but not wet and do not let them freeze.

Expect a low percentage of rooting (25%) from hardwood cuttings.

 Blueberries are best rooted using new growth in May or June. These cuttings need to be watered and misted regularly or to be placed in a mini-greenhouse to keep the cuttings from drying out. Contact us for details.

 Still interested in fruit growing for the cheapskate? Contact us for more information. We can be reached at wchance@uga.edu Our phone number is listed under Houston County Government as the Cooperative Extension Service.