



Redwood Empire Chapter Newsletter

April, 2013

The 2013 Scion Exchange

Times change, and the Sebastopol Veteran's Hall was leased last year and converted to an arts center, so we relocated the scion exchange to the Santa Rosa Veteran's Hall, across from the fairgrounds.

The move detracted little from the event's success. It was a busy morning for all the volunteers; in addition to the CRFG members who attended the exchange there were a bit over 200 nonmembers who paid the \$5.00 admission fee. About 150 people either joined CRFG or renewed their memberships at the exchange.

As in prior years, we held pruning and grafting demonstrations, sold rootstocks and did grafts for attendees at bargain prices, and held a silent auction and a drawing.

Tong Lai Ginn, who was in charge of the hospitality table this year, baked wonderful biscotti and several kinds of quick breads for the table, in addition to the food donated by others.

Thanks to the work of our volunteers and generous donations from local businesses and organizations, the exchange made about \$3,700 after expenses.

Our income and expenses from the event, by category, were:

Income:

Rootstock sales: \$1186
Grafting charges: \$639
Auction: \$1405
Drawing: \$695
Misc sales: \$371
General admission: \$1027

Total income generated: approx \$6070

Expenses (amounts approximate):

Hall rental: \$1400
Prusch Park mileage for scions: \$100
Delivering scions to Booneville: \$75
Rootstock: about \$700
L. Robertson supplies: \$30
Tong: refreshments: \$70

Total expenses: approx \$2375

Upcoming Events

Mark your calendars for these chapter events:

Sunday, April 21, 11:00 -2:00: Tour of chapter member Keith Borglum's orchard, and potluck afterward. Bring food to share. Please RSVP to keith@borglum.com.

We'll be looking at how to construct a 10 x 100 ft. hoop-house greenhouse for under \$500. (See Keith's web site, <http://www.borglum.com/garden/>, for a photo of the hoop house.) You can also see and purchase trees potted for the July public sale for \$20 ea. And if you want free fava beans or greens, bring bag(s).

Keith's address is 3468 Piner Road, Santa Rosa 95401. For GPS-ers, trust mailbox #s over GPS when you get near. For analog travelers, it's 2 miles west of Fulton Road, one mailbox east of Willowside Rd, name and # on mailbox.

After the tour, for those interested, the nearby Kendal Jackson Wine Center offers a self-guided tour of their gardens; they are open until 5. The address is 5007 Fulton Road, Fulton, CA, their phone number is 866.287.9818.

Sunday, May 5, 2:00-4:00: Bark grafting clinic: at David Ulmer's house, 7157 Camellia Lane, Sebastopol. Bark grafting can be done when trees are no longer dormant, and it is the most successful method for certain types of trees, notably persimmons. David will demonstrate the technique using persimmon wood. No RSVP necessary.

Non-chapter event of interest:

June 7, 7:00 p.m.: author Michael Pollan speaking at the Seed Bank:

Beginning on Tuesday, April 23, tickets will be available at Copperfield's Books, 140 Kentucky Street, Petaluma, for a talk by bestselling author Michael Pollan at The Seed Bank, 199 Petaluma Blvd. North in downtown Petaluma, on Monday, June 17, at 7 p.m. Pollan will talk about his new book, *Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation*. Admission is free with a \$27.95 book purchase (which includes the option to purchase a \$5 companion ticket).

For more information go to <http://copperfieldsbooks.com/>.

More from the 2012 Festival of Fruit: Axel Kratel on growing apples:

Axel Kratel grows 800 varieties of apples in Santa Cruz and moderates a forum, the Cloudforest Café, <http://www.cloudforest.com/cafe/>. His talk at the 2012 Festival of Fruit emphasized heirloom and eating apples.

His initial advice for anyone considering what kinds of apples to grow is not to judge a variety by how it tastes in one season. Apples vary a lot from year to year, and you'll want to try it for several seasons before judging its quality.

The search for apple varieties can be confusing because apples are sometimes grown under more than one name. An apple may acquire another name when it is imported to another country. Sometimes commercial growers will give an apple a more catchy name to make it more attractive to retail customers. And some varieties have been renamed to evade patent laws.

He recommended the Greenmantle Nursery as a source for apples.

Different apples ripen at different times of year. You can have apples all the way from May through well into winter, if you choose your varieties to ripen at different times. However, summer, fall, and winter apples have different characteristics, which you'll want to keep in mind.

Summer apples tend to have soft flesh and are easily damaged. Their flavors tend to be more acidic and tangy, with more berry overtones. Some popular summer varieties are Pink Pearl, Gravenstein, Pristine, Viking, Williams Pride, and Yellow Transparent.

Most true low chill apples – the varieties that will fruit in places such as southern California, where there is very little winter chill – are summer apples. The only true low chill apples he knows are Anna and Dorset Golden. Both flower in the winter.

Summer apples do not, as a rule, store well. One exception is Zestar. Another variety he has grown, Sansa, will keep also, but not as long.

Winter apples are very different from summer apples. Some winter apples are actually subtropical apples, needing only medium chill and a very long season to ripen. Winter apples include Hauer Pippin, Sundowner, Lady Williams, and Granny Smith. Granny Smith is harvested green in the Southern Hemisphere. If you leave them on the tree to ripen, they turn yellow and sweet.

One of the astonishing characteristics of winter apples is that in many varieties, fruit bruised after picking will actually heal. Winter apples not only store well, but are very hardy; some can remain on the tree in temperatures as low as 18 degrees F. without damage.

EARLY SPRING GRAFTING WORKSHOP

The chapter's first spring grafting workshop was held at David Ulmer's house on the afternoon of March 9. It was very well-attended; around thirty people came by to watch David demonstrate cleft and whip-and-tongue grafts, tour his remarkable orchard and garden, and receive individual instruction from several of our other expert grafters. The weather cooperated, and the afternoon was sunny and warm, a perfect day for an outdoor event. We also had scions to give away and some apple, plum, and pear rootstocks for sale.

Fall apples show a mix of summer and winter qualities. Some are more susceptible to heat and take on summer or winter qualities depending on the air temperature around the time they ripen. Some fall varieties are Shay, Mutsu, Jonagold, Freedom, My Jewel, and Hudson's Golden Gem. Some fall apples store well; others don't. You have to experiment.

For storing apples at home, you can use a chest freezer fitted with thermostat from a brewery supply store to keep your apples at a consistent 35 degrees. One problem: ethylene accumulates and can spoil some apples, although some are very dense and don't absorb it: examples are Waltana, Pink Lady. You can buy sheets that absorb ethylene.

Some of the best varieties of apples for California are Waltana, Katherine, Williams Pride, Granny Smith, Pink Lady, Sundowner, and Hauer Pippin. Macintoshes don't grow well out here because we don't get the right coolness in fall. Empire is a good substitute out here. Cherry Cox is a good substitute for Cox's Orange Pippin, which doesn't like warm fall temperatures. Axel tricked one into growing tasty apples by growing it in the shade of an oak tree.

Southern apples develop well in California fall temperatures. Good examples are Spice of Old Virginia, King David (which develops good flavor in hot fall weather), Orleans Reinette, Pinova, Karmijn de Sonnevile, and Ross Nonpareil. There's a good book on southern apples by Calhoun.

Good baking apples include Belle de Boskoop, Northern Spy, Bramley's Seedling, and Allington Pippin.

Some apples good for our climate with flavor like Mackintosh are Oliver, Macoun, Spartan, and Empire.

Golden Delicious style apples include Golden Delicious itself, Mutsu, Grimes Golden, and tree ripened Granny Smith.

Pink Pearl has a strawberry flavor and makes great juice and cider

Cider apples come in styles for blending: sharps, bitters, sweet. French cider apples tend to do better than English varieties in California. Examples: Nehou (super vigorous), Amere de Berecours, Frequin, St. Martin Domane, Doux Normandie, Metais, and Pigeonnet Blanc.

A MORNING AT SONOMA COMPOST

Linda Robertson

This February our Master Gardener training class was given a tour of the Sonoma Compost facility, above the landfill on Meacham Road in Petaluma.

Many of us have undoubtedly driven up the winding gravel road from the dump to the hilltop office and the outdoor bins nearby where you can load bags or your pickup truck with a selection of types of mulch and compost for bargain prices. Will Bakx, the founder and manager, gave us a tour behind the scenes and told us about how Sonoma Compost is made and the benefits of composting.

Yard and food trimmings are about 30% of the waste stream in the United States. Composting keeps that material out of landfills and also helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Compost sequesters carbon, provides plant nutrients, improves soil, and prevents and suppresses plant diseases. Capturing 100% of household compostable materials would be the equivalent of a 30% cut in household vehicle fuel and oil use.

Composting is managed decomposition, where particle size, moisture content, and composition are controlled. Its end products are CO₂, water, heat, and finished compost. Most composting is an aerobic process. Anaerobic methods exist but are more complex and require electrical power.

Factors influencing the composting process include the raw materials, the carbon to nitrogen ratio of the material, the amount of surface area exposed, and the size of the pile.

Sonoma Compost uses the yard trimmings we put in our green cans, about 300,000 pounds of organic waste each day. Some of the composts the company makes also include composted chicken feathers; the company uses about 10 tons of them a day, from local processing plants. The materials are ground and mixed and then formed into long windrows, about 18,000 feet of them, at the facility. Before being put into the windrows, the materials are examined, and those with too much extraneous plastic and so forth are not composted but sold to green power generating plants.

State regulations require that commercially sold compost be processed for 31 days and kept at 131 degrees F. for at least 15 of those days, to reduce pathogens; it must also be turned a specified minimum number of times during that period to expose all the material to the high temperatures. Sonoma Compost follows those regulations for both its composts and its mulches. The heat is generated by the compost windrows themselves, which reach the required temperature within about 24 hours after being formed, and it is sufficient to kill almost all pathogens and weed seeds (one exception being burr clover.) The company turns its compost twice a week at first when the pile needs most oxygen, and less often toward the end of the cycle.



A Compost Grinder

In addition to its more popular products, which include Mallard Mulch, Vineyard Mulch, and some chipped wood mulches, Sonoma Compost has started making a compost on a smaller scale employing biodynamic principles and materials. It also sells biochar, though it doesn't produce it itself.

So far, the company composts only plant materials; additional equipment would be needed to compost meat and dairy waste.

As we walked through the facility we got to see the piles of green yard waste and the heavy machinery which grinds it into small pieces, forms the windrows, and turns them. The windrows were steaming in the winter air, and we got to reach into them and feel how warm they were just a few inches from the surface, and sometimes stop for a look at the wonderful views across the hills and ranchlands surrounding the place. A surreal touch was the cry of a redtailed hawk played from a loudspeaker every fifteen minutes or so, to keep the seagulls attracted by the chicken feathers from settling on the windrows.

Much is saved at the facility that doesn't go into the compost windrows. People bring logs and branches after trimming or cutting down trees; the smaller material is ground into mulch or compost, but the larger pieces are split into firewood, aged, and sold. Reclaimed lumber is also sometimes available for sale. Nurseries sometimes discard unsold plant starts, which the staff tend in a greenhouse and plant in their own gardens. Often the staff rescue living plants tossed into green bins: the little building holding the building's office is surrounded by an attractive, random landscape of reclaimed shrubs, flowers, and succulents.

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