



Redwood Empire Chapter Newsletter

January, 2012

THE 2011 FESTIVAL OF FRUIT:

POMEGRANATES IN THE SOUTHWESTERN
UNITED STATES

By Harvey Correia

*(Adapted from an article in the Fruit Leaf, the
Santa Clara chapter newsletter.)*

This year's Festival of Fruit was held on
November 5, 2011, at the Arizona State University, in
Tempe, Arizona.

On the previous evening, about 150 people
attended the reception dinner held at the home of member
Randy Yavitz, who with his wife maintains a
small urban citrus farm with other exotic plants. I brought
12 bottles of varietal pomegranate wine that Joe Real made
from my 2010 crop, and it went fast!

Here are a few of the highlights of the speaker's
program on November 5:

Richard Ashton of Texas, founder of a
cooperative of Texas pomegranate growers, was the
keynote speaker during Saturday's dinner and also gave a
talk at the beginning of the sessions. He explained that
Texas has several growing areas faced with very cold
winters that limit the ability to grow soft-seeded varieties,
with Sumbar the only soft-seeded variety they've found to
be cold hardy. They've also renamed several varieties for
marketing purposes.

Texas Red, one of the varieties he grows, is an
unknown variety sent from Turkmenistan to the USDA
Repository in Byron, Georgia and then to a hobby grower
who learned too late that permanent markers are not really
permanent. Davis will probably eventually confirm its
identification with DNA testing. Out of four tastings held in
Texas, Texas Red was rated best once, and second best
another time.

To help improve fruit size and ripening, growers
remove all late blooms with a goal of 70-100 fruits per tree.
This practice is a good one for Northern California, too.

Edgar Valdivia from Simi Valley spoke about the
works of John Chater of Camarillo, discussing
enthusiastically and with his characteristic good humor the
many varieties Mr. Chater developed.

Jeff Moersfelder from the USDA Davis
Repository spoke about the propagation of pomegranates
from cuttings, with a wonderful PowerPoint presentation
that also showed examples of the great diversity in the
collection at Wolfskill.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Can't get enough scion exchanges? Here are
some still to come from other CRFG chapters:

Saturday, January 14: Santa Clara chapter scion
exchange, Prusch Park, San Jose

Saturday, January 21: Golden Gate chapter scion
exchange, Student Union Building, Laney College

Sunday, January 22: Sacramento chapter scion
exchange, Agricultural Extension office, Sacramento

Saturday, January 28: Redwood Empire scion
exchange, Veterans' Building, 282 High Street, Sebastopol

Saturday, February 4: scion and seed exchange,
Boonville High School, Boonville

Saturday, February 18: Central Coast chapter scion
exchange, San Luis Obispo, at the Crops Unit at Cal Poly,
corner of Highland and Mt. Bishop Road on the Cal Poly
campus.

And don't miss the RECRFG spring grafting
clinic, Saturday, March 10 from 1 to 4, at David Ulmer's
house, 7157 Camellia Lane, Sebastopol.

NOTES FROM THE 2011 FESTIVAL OF FRUIT

By Linda Robertson

Several intrepid northern Californians made the
trip to Tempe for this year's Festival of Fruit. I went, I
have to admit, wondering how much I would learn in
Arizona that would help me grow things in coastal
California; the short answer was (as it generally is) more
than I thought. And I met interesting people from other
chapters, connected with people I knew, and got to see and
learn a lot that was new to me about the climate and
cultures of the Southwest.

On Thursday, November 3, I went on a tour of the
University of Arizona Extension Community Garden, a
garden and orchard started about fifteen years ago by
members of the local chapter of the Arizona Rare Fruit
Growers. Jim Oravetz, the president of the chapter, was
our guide.

The chapter has planted the garden with a
surprising number of semitropical fruit trees and bushes,
including bananas, guavas, longans, pitahayas, sugarcane,
and black and white sapotes, and is monitoring how well
they do in Arizona's climate.

About 4 years ago, with the rise in popularity of
pomegranates, the University of Arizona began

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Correia Continued

I gave a talk on the PomWorldwide, the pomegranate Yahoo discussion group, along with examples of experiences we've shared from around the world.

The midday break featured a pomegranate tasting which included fruit from Wolfskill, as well as from various sources in Arizona, and some of John Chater's varieties from Camarillo. Arizona growers have a very difficult time getting good color and taste in their fruits because of the extremely hot weather there, so some growers say they usually don't harvest until December. These climatic and cultural differences often result in big changes in taste. In some cases, we were able to taste the same varieties from Wolfskill and Arizona, and the Wolfskill-grown pomegranates were darker and better-tasting. But even the fruit from Wolfskill was inferior to what I've tasted in previous years.

Desertnyi, one of my personal favorites, won the tasting. This variety only has a little bit of tartness, which helped it to win this year, when sugar levels were generally lower for most varieties.

Photos by various participants are at <http://www.azrfg.org/festivalOfFruit/photos2011.html>. The Arizona chapter also plans to host videos of the presentations.



We are on the constant lookout for articles about events or skills of interest to CRFG members. If you have anything to contribute, we urge you to email us. If you're worried about your writing skills, we'll happily assist .

Robertson Continued

experimenting with growing them commercially in Arizona. Working with the university, the chapter has planted about 20 varieties of pomegranates so far in the garden, from cuttings received from Jeff Moersfelder at Wolfskill. They have found that pomegranates here tend to get sunburn and are also damaged by the leaf-footed bug, which pierces holes in the fruit, allowing bacteria in which rot the fruit. They are going to try bagging the fruit, so see if that is a viable way of both keeping out the but and preventing sunburn.

Temperature extremes here also cause difficulties. In the summer it's hot, with over a hundred days a year when the temperature tops 100 degrees. In winter, temperatures can drop into the teens.

On Friday, I toured Randy Yavitz's suburban ranch, where he grows vegetables and citrus for local farmer's markets. Perhaps even more interesting than the citrus trees was the network of irrigation canals that crisscross his and his neighbors' land. The canals were the work of the Hohokam, a Native American society that lived and farmed in southern Arizona about a thousand years ago. The Hohokam disappeared when a 75-year drought forced them from their land, and no one knows where they went, but the canals they built were so well made and placed that ranchers, including the Yavitzes, still use them.

Saturday, November 5, was a full day, with a great roster of speakers, a pomegranate tasting over the lunch break, a silent auction at the end of the day, and a dinner with a Hawaiian theme. Richard Ashton, who grows pomegranates commercially in Texas was the first speaker of the morning and the keynote speaker at the dinner that evening.

Several speakers, including Harvey Correia, gave excellent, practical presentations about growing pomegranates. Harvey has summarized their lectures in his newsletter article, so I'll focus on a couple of non-pomegranate talks I attended.

John Verdick's talk, "From Figs to Twigs," was all about propagating and tending fig trees. Mr. Verdick lives in the coastal area of San Diego, where the challenges to growing figs resemble what we face in our area. As an illustration of the effect this year's cool summer, he began his talk by handing out panachee figs, bright green and hard as golf balls, from a tree in his yard.

He is the owner of Encanto Farms Nursery, which specializes in figs and bananas, and also operates a web site, <http://www.figs4fun.com>, which contains lots of information and a forum, all about figs.

For growing figs, he recommends a lot of mulch to keep down weeds, Vigoro citrus and avocado food around the first week in April, and 16-16-16 fertilizer about three times a year. Don't fertilize too late in cooler climates because that keeps the leaves green and prevents them from hardening for the cold.

He recommended *Fig Heaven*, by Marie
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Simmons, a cookbook of fig recipes. Good recipes can also be found on the California Fig Advisory Board web site, at <http://californiafigs.com/recipes.php>.

A lot of Mr. Verdick's talk was about propagating figs. Air layering works really well, he says. His method: use a clear water bottle (so you can see what happens). Cut the top and bottom off, put the fig branch into it, fill with compost and keep it moist. He does this with leafed out branches in late summer, with the branch still on the tree. The branch will root in about 5 weeks (10 for Black Madera). Then he cuts the branches off about 3/4 inch below the bottom of the bottle, plants the cuttings in pots and keeps them in a greenhouse for a month.

Figs will grow from seed, but won't necessarily breed true, and some are male so they won't fruit. Grafting figs is pretty easy, by wedge, t-bud, or chip bud.

He also described a couple of methods of propagating figs from cuttings by rooting them in plastic bags. He sets out one method, using ziplock bags, step by step on his web site, http://figs4fun.com/Rooting_Bag.html and <http://figs4fun.com/basics.html>. Another one starts with rooting the figs in pieces of plastic plumbing pipe inside long narrow plastic bags. He recommends against using powdered rooting compound because it causes the roots to rot. Liquid is okay, but not necessary.

Don't fertilize plants grown from cuttings, he says, until they are big enough to move to five gallon pots.

Pruning: The first crop of figs grows on last year's wood, and the second crop grows on this year's. So if you have only one crop, you must prune carefully. He prunes when his trees are dormant and typically keeps 2-3 leaf nodes from the previous year's growth.

Bird net is the best protection from birds; wrapping newspaper around ripening fruit also helps. Ants also eat figs. Gophers eat entire root systems, killing the tree. Leaves aren't an indicator of variety, except to rule some things out

His favorite fig is Black Madera.

Monte Palmer gave a talk and demonstration of fall grafting of citrus. His techniques are adapted for Arizona; for example, he favors a wedge graft over cleft grafts because there is more and tighter contact between the rootstock and scion, so less chance for them to dry out. He does a couple of bud grafts at the same time, as insurance; he prefers chip budding, again because grafts are less likely than t-bud grafts to dry out.

For topworking a single branch with a new variety, he says you will want to try to find a small enough branch close to the trunk. He recommends cutting that section of the tree back to get sunlight to the branch you want to use. You can graft onto older wood. For citrus, you want your base branch to be old enough that it has become round.

He ended his talk with an explanation of how to make plant tags out of aluminum soda cans: basically you cut a piece from the can twice the size of the tag you want, then fold it in half and punch a loophole in one end with a paper punch.

KIWI TASTING AT WOLFSKILL

By Phil Pieri

Between 30 and 40 people were present at Wolfskill Ranch's first kiwi fruit tasting on December 17. The morning was sunny, but cold, and the tasting tables were in the shade, so they were moved into the sunlight.

Our host was Jenny Smith, an Agricultural Research Science Technician, who gave an interesting description of the fruit before the tasting began. Also on hand was John Preece, Supervisory Research Leader, who spoke briefly about Wolfskill and the USDA's program there.

There were 12 varieties on the tables, 6 of the *Actinidia deliciosa* (the type with the heavy fuzzy skin that you normally find in the super markets), and 6 of the *Actinidia chinensis*, (the smooth skin variety). There were no hardy kiwi varieties available for tasting.

To my taste the two largest fruit in the *A. deliciosa* group, Tewi and a wild seedling, were the most tart. The two best (sweetest) tasting fruit were El Dorado and Bliss Yellow, in the *A. chinensis* group. Both had golden flesh.

There were also some dried sliced kiwi, though I don't know the variety. It seems the drying process brings out the sugar, and I found them delicious, with a sweet/sour taste.



RECRFG DECEMBER 11 BUSINESS MEETING AND ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Our chapter's winter business meeting and election of officers was held on December 11, 2011. Thanks to Frederique Lavoipierre, we were able to use the Environmental Technologies Building at Sonoma State. Minutes of the meeting are in process and will be posted on the chapter's web site shortly.

Here are some highlights of the meeting.

Mike Roa, our outgoing treasurer, reported that our assets this year are \$16,010.88, about \$2,700 more than the end of last year. Our major expenses in 2011 were about \$1,000 for the scion exchange (not including rootstock purchases), \$1,500 in scholarships, \$950 in donations, \$240 for insurance, and about \$100 in reimbursed member expenses. Mike anticipates that our income for 2012 will be about \$3,000. After a discussion it was decided that the chapter will keep a reserve of \$7,000.

We elected officers for 2012. Here's the roster:

Chair: Linda Robertson

Treasurer: Michael Kurland

Secretary: Geoff Wells

David Ulmer will continue as biomanager, and Linda Robertson and Michael Kurland will continue to put out the newsletter.

Phil Pieri will again coordinate the scion exchange.

Tony Bryhan will continue as events coordinator. He welcomes ideas for tours and other events and for speakers. His e-mail address is abryhan@comcast.net.

Our chapter will be working with the Golden Gate chapter to put on the 2012 Festival of Fruit. Geoff Wells volunteered to be our point person to communicate with GGCRFG about planning and division of labor.

APPLE TASTING

The apple tasting event this year was held on October 23 at Terry and Carolyn Harrison's home in Healdsburg.

After a delicious and varied potluck lunch, Terry hosted a tour of his orchard, after which we tasted about 40 varieties of apples and 8 of pears and rated them. We rated the fruit by a show of hands: for each variety participants were asked to raise their hands if they rated it 7 or higher on a scale of 1-10, and again if they rated it 4 or below.

Among the apples, the highest ratings went to Spartan, Liberty, Tydeman's Late Orange Baldwin, Fukunishiki, Gold Rush, and Wickson. Lowest scorers were Granny Smith, Northern Spy, Vermillion D/Espargne, Melrose, and Black Twig. The complete ratings are listed in David Ulmer's chart reprinted at the end of this newsletter.

The pears, from most to least popular, were:

1. Red Comice
2. Beurre Hardy
3. Conference
4. Grand Champion
5. Duchess D'Angouleme
6. Louise Bonne de Jersey
7. Dana Hovey
8. White Doyenne

BOOK REVIEW: *THE APPLE LOVER'S COOKBOOK* by Jack and Besse Garner

We are recommending the new book *The Apple Lover's Cookbook* by Amy Traverso to everyone. We stumbled upon it in a bookstore in Sonoma and found it full of useful information. It is a cookbook and therefore has a variety of tasty recipes but it is also an apple resource book. It contains a biography of 59 popular varieties of apples including a color picture, taste, texture, season, best use, and origin. It has some basic grafting directions as well as information on the Cornell breeding program, and various apple growing regions in the United States. This book satisfied both of our interests: propagating apples and creatively eating them.