



Redwood Empire Chapter Newsletter

January 2007

THE FESTIVAL OF FRUIT

Notes on the Festival

by David Thompson



A view of Norm Beard's Nursery

As part of the 2006 Festival of Fruit, CRFG members had the opportunity to tour local orchards and nurseries, including those of two growers of subtropical fruit, Norm Beard and Jack Sword.

Norm Beard's nursery is in the hills above Goleta just off Highway 101, in an area that is typically above the marine layer and rarely sees frost.

Norm had just picked hundreds of pounds of avocados, which were sitting in huge bins near the entrance. We started the tour by peeking under his trellis made with timbers from an inn where famed outlaw Jesse James once spent a night in Paso Robles. He had planted a passion fruit there, and the vine had literally taken over the trellis and was dripping with slightly unripe passion fruits.

We spent the next hour walking around Norm's thriving fruit farm and sampling a variety of sapotes and bananas. Norm grows exotic fruit trees such as longans, cherimoyas, the ice cream bean, common in Central and South America, and the lucuma, often used as flavoring in ice cream. We were surprised to see Norm was also growing cranberries. His mango trees were loaded with fruit. Norm sells a variety of tropical fruit trees and graciously let some of the members take home some of the fruit.

Jack Sword has a tropical fruit garden in Nipomo, with almost two acres of mostly sub-tropical fruit trees some of which have been growing for over 30 years. His farm is on an old sand dune and the drainage is excellent. Jack lives here 6 months of the year and spends the other 6 months of

A Great Experience

by Peter Holleman

The Festival of Fruit 2006 was a great experience, well organized, with educational activities for a wide range of ages and expertise, and the Central Chapter members were gracious and hospitable.

The theme of the festival, Future Farmers of America, was echoed in the introductory speech of Co-Chairman Joe Sabol and the keynote address by A. G. Kawamura, Secretary, California Department of Food and Agriculture, Sacramento. Both stressed the need for young people to carry on the knowledge and tradition of farming.

Because of my interest in apples, I especially enjoyed speakers Dr. John DeVincenzo, a See Canyon fruit grower, and Phil Forsline, Curator for Apples, U.S.D.A., Cornell University, Geneva, N.Y. Coincidentally, I had visited Dr. DeVincenzo's apple farm and business in See Canyon earlier in the week.

Dr. DeVincenzo, an orthodontist, started off his lecture by saying "let's get things straight" (orthodontist humor). "People said you can't make any money with apples. Well, I sent my three kids to Stanford on apple money." He explained in detail how to create new breeds of apples, starting with the collection of pollen, pollinating, then using those seeds to grow cultivars to graft to old rootstock for faster fruiting. It's a lot of work, and he may have 1 to 5 winners out of thousands of tries. He also spoke of breeding apples for higher vitamin C content.

Phil Forsline spoke about an important effort being made in Geneva, New York, to preserve examples of about 20,000 varieties of apples, vegetables, cold hardy grapes, and tart cherries, to ensure they will be around for generations to come. Phil was particularly proud of his involvement in collecting cultivars and seeds through out central Asia. He took part in seven such trips from 1989 to 1996. The results of these findings, many from Kazakhstan, have already more than doubled the Plant Genetic Research Unit's collection from 1140 samples, to over 3,900. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan alone added 949 →

the year on his sailboat in Mexico. Although he is away from it for half the year, his garden looks spectacular. We sampled many sapotes, citrus (including a variety of lemons which look and smell like other lemons but are incredibly sweet), coffee beans, and macadamia nuts. Jack also has a 20 foot tall paw paw tree which has produced large fruits in the past.

accessions. Phil and his group believe that within the next five years strains of apples will be available with significant resistant to apple scab and fire blight, from crosses between Kazak and American apples.

Early in the festival, I was part of a Tuesday morning tour at Norm Beard's place in Goleta. One thing I learned there is that banana trees provide a microclimate for other fruits. They absorb heat during the day, and release heat and moisture at night. At this point, though, Norm said he has so many banana trees he's removing them as weeds. We were able to sample bananas and a ripe Yellow Sapote off the tree and to see both male and female banana flowers.

The mushroom farm tour, another festival activity, was fantastic. The farm is one of many dispersed all over the U.S. and owned by a private individual under the name Monterey Mushroom Company. The company also has a farm in Canada and one in Mexico. We heard about the marketing campaign that turned the Portabella mushroom from an undesirable brown mushroom to one that sells for a premium price. We also learned about the ninety day cycle of growing a batch of mushrooms and many of the details of their production and processing. Talk about labor intensive! And if the power goes out for more than three hours the crops are lost. The previous owners of the farm had closed it, in fact, because of crop losses due to power failures. These days, PG&E guarantees power up within three hours by patching into other grids or coming out in big semis with huge generators during power failures.

The tour of Nojoqui Farms was also great. This organic farm provides Frontier Markets with produce. We learned how to make a compost tea sprayer and why and how it works as an alternative to other sprays. We also learned about the Quidan trellis system and frost protection system for grapes, about canopy to fruit ratio in grapes, and about how too much fruit can send grapes into an alternating cycle or vegetative state. We also learned about the processing of leaf vegetables. Have you ever thought why growers use waxed boxes? It's because after packaging, the vegetables are subjected to a cool water bath.

Having dived for abalone on the north coast, I found the tour of the abalone farm fascinating, even though it did not involve a fruit or vegetable. The farm was started in the 1960s and now sells about 200 red abalone a day at a size of no more than 4 ½ inches. Most are sold to sushi restaurants for about \$20 a pound alive in the shell

Back at Cal Poly I checked out the commercial compost venture, which turned out to be a fairly simple operation. I also toured the university's orchards and its organic farm operation, which sells weekly food boxes by subscription.

The blueberry trials with Dr. Mark Gaskell were interesting. Blueberries were not a common commercial crop in California until the past ten years or so, but high demand for blueberries year round has given rise to commercial blueberry growing in California. Dr. Gaskell emphasized the importance of the right soil pH (5.1) for growing blueberries. He also mentioned that they have shallow roots and talked about the importance of thinning.

The class on Diseases and Pests was also very interesting. The speaker, Franklin Laemmlen, discussed the cycles of plant diseases. Mr. Laemmlen is an alumnus of U.C. Davis, which he referred to as Mecca for plant genealogy.

These were the highlights of my visit to the Festival. If anyone is interested in more information on the abalone farm or mushroom farm, I took detailed notes describing all phases of the operations. I can be reached at rocklandpeter@yahoo.com.



A Fruiting Palm

A Visit with Joe Real

By Mike Lee

Those of you who frequent, post, or lurk on online fruit forums such as cloudforest.com/café or bananas.org will recognize Joe Real. Inevitably, you will read a post from him at some point that will leave you shaking your head. He'll be the one who will post a 20 photo tutorial on how to bark graft. Or explain how he over-wintered 60 banana varieties in pots to see which ones would survive his Zone 9a Davis, California, winter.

This August, Joe was the key note speaker for the Santa Clara CRFG chapter explaining how to grow bananas in Northern Calif. A few days later, I got the chance to visit Joe, who graciously allowed me to invite myself over.

Joe's place is a typical subdivision house with a small lot. However, as he showed me around his front yard, I started to notice surprising things. He had guerrilla-grafted his city-planted quince tree to numerous pear varieties. He showed me an apple tree that he grafted exclusively to apple varieties with pink or red flesh

It's apparent, too, that Joe has a fondness for citrus. In one tree with over 50 varieties, he pointed out a Ponderosa lemon. This is a tender variety that has no business fruiting in a place with winter lows of 22 degrees. His technique is to graft in vertical canopy layers with the least hardy below to most hardy on top -- lemons and limes on the bottom, oranges next, then navel oranges, with calamondins and mandarins at the exposed top of the tree. In passing, he mentioned he has every citrus variety from the USDA Riverside. →

Then there's the persimmon tree to which he bark-grafted 15 varieties this spring. All of them took. There was fruit on some of the grafts. I asked why, and he explained that if the graft looks overly vigorous, he'll slow it down by letting it fruit.

While he was giving his tour, Joe was barbecuing, and his very hospitable wife, Amy, was plying me with lumpia, (Phillipino egg-rolls). Joe told me he'd gotten 25 pounds of pluots off one of his trees this year. I could see a couple of plum-like trees buried in the undergrowth in his yard. But 25 pounds? I got precisely 2 dapple dandy's over the last year, and my dog ate one of them.. Then out came his homemade pluot wine. It tasted like wine from Kendall-Jackson!

Around the edges of his (I want to say) 14,000 sq. ft. lot, he explained that he has 47 trees planted. He has over 250 varieties on those trees. I was nodding numbly. Amazingly, he also has room for a grass-thatched gazebo-hut, in the backyard. In front of the hut were bananas hanging from Dwarf Brazilians. A little farther back was the famous California Gold. Around a corner, an Ice Cream towered, and yes, there was a respectable sized-bunch of bananas on it. As I listed the varieties I have at home, he explained that those varieties will not need digging up for over-wintering. He simply allows the frozen leaves to insulate the stems.

With a Dwarf Brazilian pup under my arm and reluctantly declining tastes of other fruit wines he's made, I thanked Joe for his hospitality and headed back home. Even now, months later, I think about what I saw and still can't quite believe he grows what he does.



Bananas at Joe Real

Bananas in Winter

By Mike Lee

After four or five days in the mid 20's (I know this from experience when water in my garden hose freezes), I've had a chance to rethink how cold-hardy my 11 banana plants are.

Plan A was to have all of them dug up, covered in straw, and rolled up in a tarp long before December. Most of you who have heard me say this, have politely nodded and pretended to listen to me as if I was a sane person. When I looked at bananas.org., though, the postings seemed to suggest that all the varieties I had should be able to over winter outside just fine in Zone 9. Good, I thought, because as the plants got bigger and bigger, the digging up idea was becoming rather daunting. So I contemplated a Plan B.



Mike Lee's Frozen Bananas

My Plan B was to let the first freeze kill the leaves and then wrap up most of them with the heavy-duty reemay I use to cover some of my more tender plants. Well, after the first couple of freezes, all the banana leaves turned brown and collapsed, overlapping like shingles. But the leaf petioles, which were thicker, stayed green and continued to extend out. Also, the stalk (or more accurately, the pseudostem,) stayed green as well. With the leaf petioles still extending, wrapping was going to be a little harder. It also seemed that the dead leaves were protecting the pseudostems, some of which are 6-9" in diameter at the base, from frost.

So I'm still waiting for these petioles to freeze.

Actually, my latest Plan (Plan C?) is to do nothing. These plants seem fairly intent on getting through this winter on their own. But then it seems I've developed a certain ruthless streak. Maybe it was that when last year's freezing killed 3 Cherimoyas. I was surprised to realize I didn't care too much. This year, every time I walk by them, I can kind of hear myself saying to the Cherimoya resprouts, "Don't have what it takes, don't cha?"

October Apple Tasting

by David Ulmer

If you've never been to a blind apple tasting, then you've missed a special treat. Kalia and Jon Kliban were our hosts for an afternoon of fellowship and gastronomic pleasure. In addition to formally tasting 33 apples, we had other goodies to sample including European and Asian pears, grapes, persimmons, figs, tomatoes, pawpaw and pitaya among other things. There were apples and pears to take home as well.

The 33 varieties tasted: Arkansas Black, Ashmead's Kernel, Belle De Boskoop, Braeburn, Cinnamon Spice, Cox's Orange Pippin, Criterion (?) *Some thought it was Yellow Transparent*, Elstar, Erwin Bauer, Fuji, Gala (Royal Gala), Gene Dubik Unknown, Golden Delicious, Golden Russet, Goldrush, Grimes GoldenHawaii, Honey Crisp, Hudson's Golden Gem, Jonagold, Jonathan, Kidd's Orange Red, Liberty, Macoun, Melrose, Mutsu, Red Delicious (Hawkeye), Shizuka, Spartan, Spigold, Spitzenburg, Tydeman's Late Orange, Pink Pearl

Each apple was tasted without knowing variety names. We then voted for each variety and at the end, the two winners chosen were both from the same Japanese breeding program. Shizuka was #1 followed closely by Mutsu. Interestingly, Ted Richardson related that Mutsu always wins at his elementary school tastings. I think Fuji would have been a close runner-up if it had been a little riper. That proves that even fruit savvy adults like sweet apples. Almost every variety had a few supporters. The

Hawkeye Red Delicious was the least appreciated. If I remember, Ted voted for it because it had a great "crunch". The oldest apple variety in the group was Ashmead's Kernel. It historically ranks very highly at tastings and lived up to its reputation. On the other hand, a very new variety out of the Minnesota breeding program, Honeycrisp, also ranked very highly. A surprise to me was the large number that liked the old Dutch variety Belle de Boskoop. It is a late, very tart apple that I really didn't think was ripe enough to taste, but since it was falling from the tree, I brought it along. It made a wonderful pie at Thanksgiving. If you would like descriptions of the varieties tasted, I'll send you a Word document. Drop me an e-mail at davidu9999@gmail.com.

Calendar of Coming Events

Jan. 17, Wednesday 2nd planning meeting for scion exchange 7:15 PM 7157 Camellia, Sebastopol (David Ulmer's house)

Jan 27, Saturday Redwood Empire Scion Exchange 10-2:PM Sebastopol Vets Memorial Building

Feb 25, Sunday Grafting Clinic 1-3:30 PM 7157 Camellia, Sebastopol

Mar. 24, Saturday Annual Meeting and Potluck 11-2:30PM Luther Burbank Farm, Sebastopol

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