



# Redwood Empire Chapter Newsletter

May 15, 2007

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## REC RFG ANNUAL MEETING

The Redwood Empire chapter held its annual potluck lunch and business meeting on March 24, at the Luther Burbank Farm in Sebastopol.

The three elected officers (Chair: David Ulmer, Secretary: Gary Goodenough, and Treasurer: Mike Roa) all agreed to serve another year unless someone else would like to serve in those positions. Since nobody else volunteered, all three were re-elected unanimously. David pointed out that the Bylaws prohibit serving for more than three consecutive years, so next year the chapter will need other people willing to hold those jobs.

All committee chairs also agreed to continue leading their committees, with two exceptions: Mike Lee would like for someone else to take over the events coordinator position. David Ulmer reported that Kalia Kliban had offered to serve in a capacity that didn't require regular attendance at weekend meetings, so it was agreed to ask her to serve as events coordinator, with Mike Lee and Carlo Bottini helping her.

Treasurer Mike Roa summarized income and expenses for the last year. Even though we have purchased approximately \$450 worth of materials, we have about \$1400 more money in our checking account and American Century investment than we did a year ago. Approximately \$600 of that, however, is to be used to pay for insurance when billed by CRFG in August.

There was an interesting discussion about the disappearing Gravenstein orchards. Slow Food USA has included Gravensteins in its Ark of Taste, a collection of heirloom fruits and vegetables and other traditional foods. Keith asked about grafting Gravensteins onto potted trees, for possible sale to Slow Food members interested in growing them. It was agreed that this was a good idea. Carolyn Harrison reported that she has an old Gravenstein tree grown from an "original" tree in Fort Ross, and that she would be happy to provide scions in the future.

Terry Harrison, who is the chair of the Community Alliance of Family Farmers, reported on the Alliance's plan to promote local produce through Buy Fresh, Buy Local programs in nine Bay Area cities this summer, beginning in June.

Mike Lee requested that people suggest books to add to the library. Mike Roa suggested that a brief article in the newsletter might include a list of the books that we currently own, and Keith Borglum suggested that the chapter web page might include information on the library also.

### A Note about Misnamed Varieties

by David Ulmer

It's embarrassing to be caught by your fellow fruit growers with even one variety that you've misnamed -- but two in one day? That happened to me at our October apple tasting. I was proudly showing off a bunch of my Himrod seedless grape that was ripening its second crop at the time of our October event, when Paul Apffel from Corte Madera said, "That pink grape isn't Himrod, Himrod's green." I should have read the description; alas, I didn't. Right he was!

Not long afterward, Ted Richardson told me that the Asian pear I'd labeled Kikusui was really Shinko. Again, if I had taken the trouble to cross check the variety description, I would have saved myself further embarrassment. Kikusui stays green when ripe.

Since then, I have found two other misnamed trees in my orchard. I have an apple grafted as Newton Pippin that turned out to be a late red variety that I have yet to identify. Second, a persimmon labeled Ichi-Ki-Kei-Jiro that is the common Hachiya.

All these misnamed varieties came from our scion exchanges. The lesson to be learned from my mistakes is that we all need to be very careful, when we cut and label scions, that we know the variety is true to name. Even buying a commercially produced tree is no guarantee that it was labeled correctly. Do as I didn't do and compare the fruit with a correct variety description before exchanging varieties with friends.

## The RECRFG Scion Exchange

Our annual Scion Exchange was held on January 27, at the Veteran's Hall in Sebastopol. It was the best-attended ever, and quite a few new members joined RECRFG during it. Many members volunteered their help with cutting scions and working at the exchange, and others donated great items for the raffle.

Keith Borglum posted photos of the scion exchange on his website:

<http://www.borglum.com/crfgr/scion2007>.

## A First for Our Chapter: A Mushroom Growing Workshop

by Henry Savage

On March 10, CRFG member Chris Bailey, of Gourmet Mushrooms in Graton ([www.mycopia.com](http://www.mycopia.com)), hosted a workshop for members on cultivating mushrooms. He brought materials for plugging logs to cultivate shiitake



Chris Bailey shows how to prepare a log for inoculation with mycelium

mushrooms, and talked about fungi in general, growing mushrooms, and the shiitake itself.

The shiitake is an exotic, imported from Asia, where it has been cultivated for centuries. The process of cultivating mushrooms by plugging logs was developed in the 1930's. The process Chris taught us involved drilling holes in logs and inserting wooden dowels impregnated with the mycelium of hybridized, patented, vigorous varieties of shiitake developed by Gourmet Mushrooms.

Here's what Chris explained to us about the technique of mushroom cultivation.

**Logs:** Shiitake prefer oak (including tan oak), though some other broadleaf species with hard wood will work. Logs should be about 4" to 10" in diameter and about two or three feet long. These dimensions give a log which has enough food (wood) for the fungus and is small enough to handle. Smaller logs dry out faster (a bad thing). If possible, avoid logs with very thick bark. Try to minimize damage and breaks in the bark which become pathways for opportunistic fungal contamination. Trees can be cut for logs anytime from about 90% leaf fall until the sap begins to rise. Let the logs rest for a few weeks to allow the natural anti-fungals in the wood to dissipate. If the log is left too long, however, other fungus species may begin to colonize it, and out-compete the shiitake.

**Dowels:** Chris supplied these for the workshop, and they are also available from Gourmet Mushrooms in bags of about 1,000 dowels. (There was some talk of doing group purchases next year through our CRFG chapter.) The dowels are impregnated with live fungal mycelium; Gourmet Mushrooms has them for shiitake and several other species. The dowels are best used fresh, but can be refrigerated for months. Because they contain living mycelium, they should not be allowed to overheat or dry out.

**Drilling the holes:** The holes should be close enough together to allow the fungus to colonize the log in a reasonable amount of time. On a four inch diameter log Chris recommended four rows of holes spaced four inches apart down the log staggering the holes in each row from those in the rows next to it, producing a diamond pattern. Holes should also be drilled around the edge of the cut ends of the log and into or next to other cuts in the bark. This is to give the shiitake fungus a head start on opportunistic fungal infections at these sites. For the size dowel we were using, the holes were drilled with a bit diameter of 11/32 inch or 21/64 inch. The depth of the hole should be slightly greater than the length of the dowel so that when the dowel is driven in with a hammer, it's top is a little below the bark surface. Too deep holes is not good. In using the hammer, try to minimize damage to the bark. When all dowels are in place, the tops of the holes and other small cuts in the bark are painted with melted wax. We used canning paraffin. The logs were then tagged with ordinary aluminum plant tags, nailed on, with useful information such as the varietal name and date and kind of log used, and so on.

**Care of the log:** Give the mycelium what it wants: it likes shade, high humidity, and temperatures in the area of 70 to 75 degrees. Think a moist forest floor. So put the logs in the shade, and water them once or twice a week. They can be put on pallets or stacked or leaned against a wall, but should have some air circulation. When the fungus is fruiting (making mushrooms) logs can be leaned so that their tops touch in a sort of A-frame; this gives you access to all sides of the log for harvesting. Ground contact is not good as it encourages contamination by ground fungi. Don't over water. A mister for five minutes a day would probably be okay. If the bark at the cut ends of the log starts to separate from the wood, the log is drying out. The mycelium can handle temperatures in the 90's, but doesn't like it. (The fruiting bodies (mushrooms) can't take such high temperatures.)

**Harvesting:** If all goes well the mushrooms should start to appear in about 18 to 24 months. They may appear at any time of the year except summer, but the onset of cool wet weather in our climate is the likeliest time. For the best flavor, harvest the mushrooms well before their tops begin to flatten out. The log may last 5 to 7 years before it begins to fall apart.

## Building a Mason Bee House

by Gene Dubik and Linda Robertson

Those of us with small orchards or backyard fruit trees generally rely on insects that happen to be in the neighborhood to pollinate our trees. But if there aren't enough pollinators around at the right time, we're out of luck. The mysterious die-off of honeybees around the country has focused attention on how important it is to have a healthy supply of pollinating insects. One group of native pollinators, mason bees, is easy for a home gardener to attract and keep around.

Mason bees are smaller than honeybees, and dark colored. They can sting, but they're gentle and not aggressive. They don't form colonies, though they like to nest near other mason bees. The females make nests by finding small holes in wood, such as insect tunnels, laying eggs in them, and filling the tunnel with a healthy supply of pollen for the larvae to feed on after they hatch. They then close the nest with a plug of mud (hence the name "mason"bees).

Mason bees can be "cultivated" by setting up a bee house that is simply a chunk of wood with holes drilled in it. Some garden supply catalogs sell them, but it's easy and much less expensive to make your own.

Start with a 4x4 board of untreated wood; redwood lasts well, though pine or fir will also work. Using a 5/16" drill bit, drill a lot of deep holes in the wood. (The size of the holes is important, since larger and smaller holes attract different varieties of insects.) The holes can be placed as little as 3/4" apart.

Mount the board fairly firmly (so that it doesn't swing,) in a sheltered spot facing south or east, under an

overhang, such as an eave or a roof, and near a place with some wet soil.

If your bee house is a success, the bees will build nests in the board, and their larvae will winter over inside it as pupae and emerge in the spring, ready to pollinate your trees and start another generation of nest building.

The boards will last several years before most of the holes are filled up.

## Grafting Clinic, February, 2007

by Linda Robertson

The RECRFG's grafting clinic in February is an ideal time for members to learn to graft the scions they picked up at the January exchange. About 25 people came to the clinic this February, including both chapter members and non-members who had learned about it at the scion exchange. Some of the newcomers joined CRFG and the chapter that afternoon.



David Ulmer demonstrates shaping scion for grafting

Rootstock and some scion wood were available for apples, peaches, and pears, and some attendees brought their own to the clinic. David Ulmer, Mike Roa, Benjamin Schmid, Phil Pieri, and other experienced grafters demonstrated cleft grafting and bark grafting techniques and helped people through making their own grafts.

For me, at least, one of the highlights of the clinic was the bag of dried persimmons brought by David Ulmer. David had dried whole persimmons using a traditional Japanese technique. I'd read descriptions of the method in postings on the chapter listserv, and it seemed impossible to me that it would actually work, but David's persimmons were delicious, with a flavor and texture that reminded me a bit of medjool dates, but not as overwhelmingly sweet.

Here's the recipe, courtesy of David and Kalia Kliban:

### **Dried Persimmons:**

Use persimmons that have turned color but are still firm. Astringent types are traditional (they lose their astringency when they dry), but fuyu types can also be used.

Peel them, but don't remove their crowns and stems; then hang them by their stems in a warm, dry place for about six weeks. You can string them on a string or hang them individually using Christmas ornament hangers or bent paper clips; just make sure they don't touch each other.

As they dry, they sometimes get a white speckling which may look like mold, but is actually sugar.

## **The Chapter Lending Library**

by Mike Lee

Did you know that our chapter has books on fruit culture and gardening that are yours for the borrowing?

Yes, we have a small, but growing library of reference books. Some are hard-to-find out of print classics. Others are just plain expensive. But all of them are informative. Our volunteer librarian, Benjamin Schmid, brings the books to each event, and any chapter member can borrow them until the next event by leaving a check for the replacement value of the book as a security deposit.

So what books do we have? *The World Was My Garden*, *Fruits of Warm Climates*, *Chez Panisse Fruit*, *Ortho's Citrus*, the entire collection of CRFG's *Fruit Facts*, and more. Bring your checkbook to the next meeting and take home that book you've always wanted to read!

### **BOOK REVIEW:**

#### ***The World Was My Garden***

By David Fairchild

Charles Scribner's Sons-New York, 1938

Reviewed by Mike Lee

In an age where much of the U.S. was only recently settled and automobiles were still rare, a young American, David Fairchild, set out on a steamer for Java. Little did he know that this would be the first of many journeys he would make to the world's far corners in search of new plants and varieties for the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture. In *The World Was My Garden*, his autobiography, Fairchild



David Fairchild

tells how, as a U.S.D.A. plant explorer, he hobnobbed with foreign dignitaries and attended gala events, traveled on a plague ship to obtain date palm off-shoots, combed the markets of Lima for quinoa seeds, and journeyed through Japan for new bamboo species. In telling about his adventures, he repeatedly surprises us with stories of plant acquisitions that would later become major crops.

A contemporary of Luther Burbank, Fairchild downplays the work of our local icon. He's critical of some of Burbank's commercial claims such as having invented a thornless cactus. Fairchild notes that he himself had sent Burbank thornless *Opuntias* from Argentina, Ceylon and Tunis.

Professional competitiveness aside, the wonderful collection of stories that makes up *The World Was My Garden* presents a view of an era of discovery in our world that was quick in passing. Originally priced at \$3.75, the book is now, sadly, out of print. However, we have a copy in our Chapter Lending Library that is available to all members.

## **A Chapter Plant Inventory?**

By Mike Lee

Did you ever look for a particular apple variety and have no idea where to find it, and then find out another chapter member has it in his or her backyard? What would it be like to know what our other chapter members are growing, and be able to let everyone else know what you're growing? You could find out what people were most interested in and be able to access a whole new world of plant material.

This is what a Fruiting Plant Inventory could give us. It would be a common database that we build together. Each participant would list the varieties of whatever fruiting plants they were growing, be it plums, peaches, bananas, pears, kiwis, persimmons, and so on. It could be a web-based file or one that we send back and forth. Ideally, it would be simple and accessible and easy for us to set up and maintain.

As a chapter, an inventory would help us become a unified "growing community." Our own gardens would become, in a way, an annotated part of a much larger organism.

So... we're looking for help and ideas on how to make this happen. If you're interested, post any and all of your thoughts and ideas for the project on the listserv.

**"I give my advice thus to a young plant: have a strong root, a weak stem, and an indigestible seed: so you will outlast the eternal city, and your progeny will clothe mountains, and the irascible planter will blaspheme in vain."**

**- Robert Louis Stevenson**