



Redwood Empire Chapter Newsletter

November 15, 2007

Plant Collecting in Hawaii

By Mike Lee

The invitation proved irresistible: go to Hawaii with an old friend to hunt for budwood of durians. My friend owns a nursery in Guatemala, where he has been selling rambutan trees. He was looking for a new cultivar, because he thinks Central America will be drowning in rambutan within 3 years and the market for grafted rambutan trees will dry up.

After staying in a youth hostel overnight (never again!), we made our first visit, to Frankie's nursery in Waimanolo on Oahu. In the 1980s, Frankie and his wife Lynn signed a 50 year lease from the state of Hawaii for their land. Frankie is an incredible collector with a particular fondness for durian. Unfortunately, his particular site is a little too windy and, at only 76 degrees, not warm enough.

His nursery is also a post-entry quarantine for imported plants, though, and (at that time) was also producing certified plants that could be shipped anywhere in the mainland U.S. So it was here that I loaded up on seedless guava, vanilla, black pepper, and cha-om plants to take home. Cha-om is a thorny acacia from Asia that has edible tips that remind me of garlic and meat. Later, I found that my family thought it reminded them of road kill. My friend made a mental list of durian varieties that he'd cut on the last day of the trip. Frankie and Lynn took us out for dinner where we wrestled for the check (unsuccessfully), and then they put us up for the night. Next morning, we ate a breakfast of papaya, mango, and omelets with fresh black pepper and cha-om. Incredible!

Then it was on to the Big Island. David Frenz, who lives in Hilo, has a small home nursery as well as acreage out of town. And he's crazy about durian. After getting me to promise I would hunt down some avocado clonal rootstock of *Phytophthora* resistant Torrey Canyon for him, he took us out to his farm, with its large, lush durian trees. And then we cut and cut -- wood from long kong, pulasan, rambutan, avocado, lychee and durian varieties.

After wrapping the scions in parafilm, we headed off to the USDA germplasm station a few miles away. Francis Zee, the curator, discussed his desire to have wild papaya strains from Central America cataloged. While my

friend readily conversed about identifying wild species, I tried not to say anything too ignorant. Francis was a gracious host and drove us around, showing us wild papaya trees with trunks 3 feet in diameter. He also took us to the Pili nut grove where we gathered scions and fed greedily on the nuts.



Dwight and a Wild Papaya Tree

The next day, it was on to Plant It Hawaii in Kurtistown. About 5 years ago, we had bought grafted rambutan trees from them to take to Guatemala. Now we came to talk with owner Susan Hamilton about rambutan marketing in the U.S. Currently, rambutan is shipped irradiated to the mainland. Rambutan is also irradiated in Central America for U.S. markets. Susan lamented a recent USDA change in regulation that will enable rambutan shipped fresh with no treatment to enter the U.S. Under the new regulations, it will be difficult or impossible for Hawaii and Central America to compete with rambutan imported from Thailand. With low labor costs and a virtual glut of production in Thailand, the only costs would be shipping and packaging.

After a lot of commiserating it was on to the east side of the island to Fruitlovers.com. Maybe some of you have bought seeds from Fruitlovers, aka Oscar Jaitt? On only 2 acres, Oscar grows lots of specimen trees. He also sells a book on Brazilian fruit trees that my friend was coveting. More hours of talk, fruit this, fruit that....

After even more adventures, trips to Wal-Mart, sampling Hawaiian street food, botanical gardens, looking for internet cafes, it was back to Oahu.

On the last day, we rushed back to Frankie's Nursery. Trying not to waste time talking about fruit, we cut wood, and headed to the USDA agricultural inspection station at the airport. Our goal? A phytosanitary certificate. We had 4 hours until we needed to be checking in for our flight. The inspector checked each scion and painstakingly entered species by species, variety by variety on the certificate. She stayed an hour past closing time. We rushed to the airport, fully expecting our 2 suitcases full of sticks to be pulled out of the X-ray. Somehow, as each of our bags passed through, the inspector looked away at the clock on the wall. Same thing with the X-ray for carry-ons! I guess we didn't need the paper work after all. What a trip!



Mike with jackfruit at Frank's nursery

Plant Sale

by Linda Robertson

The annual RECRFG plant sale was held on July 22, at the flea market in Sebastopol. Trees and other fruiting plants for sale included grape, several varieties of apple, cherry, sultana medlar, loquat, guava, babako, banana, sapote, and pepino. We set out samples of plums, babako and pepino for tasting. The babakos particularly impressed people, and we sold all the babako plants we had.

People bought all types of plants, but were especially interested in tropicals. Mike Lee, Phil Pieri, and David Ulmer were kept busy fielding questions from potential buyers about tropical fruit trees and how to grow them. The questioners were surprised to hear that tropicals can be grown in Sonoma County. Some were pleased to see a plant or tree they'd grown up with in Mexico or Central America. It was a successful morning, both in the number of plants sold and in the number of people who stopped by to sample a slice of babako and talk, and left knowing a bit more about fruit growing in our area.



Fig Day

by Linda Robertson

Saturday, September 8 was Fig Day at Wolfskill Ranch, UC Davis's experimental farm in Winters. The event, sponsored by the Golden Gate chapter of CRFG, featured tastings of a half dozen varieties of figs and about fifteen varieties of grapes.

Wolfskill Ranch is a USDA National Clonal Germplasm Repository, and Dr. Ed Stover, one of the curators, was our guide to the various varieties of figs and grapes on display. He explained the difference between Smyrna figs, which need to be pollinated by fig wasps in order to produce fruit, and common figs and San Pedro figs, which are self-pollinating. Smyrna figs tend to be tastier, but in coastal California, we're limited to growing common figs because of the lack of fig wasps. In climates with a long enough warm season, figs will produce two crops, one in the spring (the breba crop) and another, more flavorful crop in the fall. The breba crop produces on the previous year's growth, but the fall crop grows on new wood.

The common figs we tasted included:

- Brown Turkey
- Alma
- King (or Desert King)
- Verdal Longue

Smyrna figs on hand were:

- Zidi
- Santa Cruz dark

We also tasted a chimeral variety, Panachee, which has a striking striped skin and a red interior and ripens very late

The favorite among the group was the Zidi. People liked the complexity of its flavor, which has overtones of raspberry. Of the common figs, Brown Turkey is among the most popular varieties, probably because the fruit are big, but they aren't as sweet or as interesting in flavor as some others.

One of the best figs for cooler climates is the King or Desert King which has a very large breba crop, which ripens early. The ones we tasted were very sweet. Unfortunately its thin skin makes it too fragile for commercial production, but it's good for home orchards.

The Verdal Longue is a late fig, but it has a thick skin and transports well.

The grape varieties we tasted were a mix of seeded and seedless varieties. Some of the seeded varieties are popular in Europe, where people apparently aren't as averse to eating grape seeds as Americans are.

European grapes are of the species *Vinus vinifera*, while grapes native to the Americas are a different species, *Vinus lambrusca*.

The varieties we tasted included:

Seedless:

Red Flame: the familiar supermarket grape

Yugoslavian 2758: green, crisp, reminded me of Thompson Seedless

Seeded:

Chasselas: green, very popular in Europe

Italia: green, with a very mild muscat flavor

Uzbekistan muscat: green with muscat flavor

Alicante Bouschet: dark

Soavis: blush skin, strong muscat flavor.

Muscat Angel: sweet with thick, bitter skin

Native American grapes (*Vinus lambrusca*)

Woodruff: a mix of catawba and Concord, with a slip skin

St. Francis: a seeded, black grape

In addition to tasting fresh figs, we were treated to two kinds of barbecued figs. The one I tasted had goat cheese piped into it and was then wrapped with prosciutto and skewered with a rosemary twig. The combination of flavors, tastes -- sweet, salty, tangy -- and textures was gorgeous; I definitely recommend the recipe.

For further reading, The November/December issue of the *Fruit Gardener* is devoted to figs and includes a page of photos from the fig tasting.

And here are some Internet articles about figs and the rather tragic life cycle of the fig wasp:

<http://waynesword.palomar.edu/pljune99.htm>

<http://www.botgard.ucla.edu/html/botanytextbooks/economibotany/Ficus/index.html>

Italian Numbered Figs Found at Bay Area Scion Exchanges:

http://www.crfg.org/chapters/golden_gate/Italian%20numbered%20figs.pdf

Pear and Apple Tasting

by Linda Robertson

On September 22, a cool and drizzly Saturday, we toured Ted Richardson's orchard in Occidental. Ted grows an amazing variety of apples on his hillside orchard, and he and his wife, who are both teachers, sell apples and other produce from their ranch at local farmers' markets in the summer and fall.

The number of apple varieties overwhelmed my note-taking ability. Among those we tasted were Fuji, Mutsu, Honeycrisp, Liberty, Mcoun, and Gold Rush.

Other varieties in the orchard included Arkansas Black, Spitzenberg, and Empire.

Asian pears in Ted's orchard included Yao Li, Su Li, Hosui, and Chojuro. The Chojuro, which has a wonderful rum/butterscotch flavor, was a hit with everyone.

Ted discussed using pheromone-impregnated twist-ties against codling moths. They need to be used on a large area in order to work. The manufacturer recommends 5 acres, but Ted found them effective in his orchard even though it is smaller.



Apples for the tasting

Ted spreads burlap bags around the bases of his trees to keep weeds down. They also make compost last longer by slowing its decomposition.

After the tour, Ted and his wife served cheese, fruit, and home-made bread. With the fruit other people brought to share, the food on the table was a still-life of autumn colors, as beautiful to look at as it was to taste: reds, greens and yellows from apples and Asian pears, and pale green and brown from figs and bread.

August 25 Budding Clinic

By Mike Lee

On August 25, David Ulmer hosted yet another great budding clinic. One neat thing about this budding workshop was that it was as much a fruit tasting as an instructional event. About fifteen of us were there and sampled from a table full of midseason peaches, Asian plums, and figs. For me it was a particular treat to try the mariposa plums. David Ulmer set out figs of Italian 215 the size of small apples. And while I enjoyed his O'Henry peaches, the marvel among the peaches really was the rich, complex taste of those from his "mystery" seedling "Ulmer's Compost Peach". Mary Bottini and others brought fruit preserves to give away.

We were also lucky to have Mark Albert from Ukiah attend the meeting. In addition to bringing an extensive amount of scion material, Mark shared his experiences when working in a commercial avocado nursery. Both he and David also demonstrated their

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techniques of budding. Mark explained how with patch budding, it wasn't necessary to have bark slipping as it was in T-budding. Mark also felt that it was still timely to try and force growth from budding late August by cutting back on the rootstock tip after 2 weeks.

My haul at the end of the event? A jar of Mary's jam, scions of Mark Albert's pineapple guava, a bunch of great tasting plums, and scions of Sweet September, Ulmer's Compost, and Mike Roa's Early Treat!