



# Redwood Empire Chapter Newsletter

October, 2012

## THE FESTIVAL OF FRUIT AND HEIRLOOM EXPOSITION

*by Linda Robertson*

This year's Festival of Fruit was different from any I've been to in the past.

It began when the Santa Barbara chapter, which had been in the rotation to host the 2012 Festival, was unable to do so. The Golden Gate chapter accepted the job, with a promise of help from Redwood Empire. Early in the planning, John Valenzuela, the chair of the Golden Gate chapter, had the idea of folding the Festival into the National Heirloom Exposition. The collaboration worked out well for both events. The organizers of the Exposition gave us space for speakers and tastings. Visitors to the Exposition could hear the speakers we presented and participate in fruit tastings; and we were able to offer FOF attendees two events for the price of one: we decided not to charge for registration for the Festival, since FOF attendees would need to pay for admission to the three days of the Exposition.

The Heirloom Exposition ran from September 11 through 13. The FOF started a day earlier, with tours of the Luther Burbank home and the Gold Ridge Farm and a reception at Phil Pieri's house. During the Expo itself, thanks to all the organizing work by John Valenzuela and Idell Weydemeyer, among others, there was a great lineup of speakers and several popular tasting events. Edgar Valdivia brought dragon fruit in a range of bright colors and flavors, and Andy Mariani brought a gorgeous collection of late plums and pluots.

On Wednesday our chapter brought our cider press, and Phil Pieri supervised volunteers in cutting and pressing apples and handing out cups of utterly fresh apple juice to a long line of visitors. It was a wonderful four days. The Exposition, without or without the Festival of Fruit, is an event everyone should see if they can, a tribute to traditional and sustainable farming, old-fashioned good vegetables and fruit, and the beauty of fall produce. And CRFG's own Festival was a good fit with the purpose and overall mood of the Exposition.

## WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO

### Summer bud grafting:

David Ulmer demonstrated summer bud grafting at our clinic on July 14 at the Luther Burbank Gold Ridge Farm. About 25 people showed up to learn summer grafting techniques, including t-budding and chip budding, and to practice on rootstocks provided by the chapter and whatever people brought in for assistance.

### Plant sale:

On July 21 we held our annual plant sale, the first at the new Santa Rosa farmer's market at the Wells Fargo Center.

We had a half dozen tables filled with trees, and a lot more on the pavement around them. In addition to the apples and pears we grafted earlier this year for the sale, Phil Pieri brought a mulberry, babaco and other subtropicals, Gene Dubnik brought Asian pears and grapes, and other people brought in red currents, a fig, and a variety of other plants and trees.

It was a lively, warm morning, and we were kept busy selling plants. Some of the people who stopped by told us they wait all year for our sale. By about 12:30, when we finished, we had sold over 2/3 of our stock and signed up a few new CRFG members. Our sales for the morning totalled around \$1,500.

In addition to the grafting clinics and other events we hold primarily for members, our chapter has participated in a number of events in the wider community.

### Gravenstein Apple Fair:

The Gravenstein Apple Fair, Sonoma County's annual celebration of our signature early apple, was held on the weekend of August 11 and 12, in Ragle Ranch Park, in Sebastopol. This year, the fair expanded into a second space, a large field in the park, and its managers, Sonoma County Farm Trails, invited RECRFG to participate.

Chapter members worked on setting up our booth, brought fruit and apple trees for display, and worked over the weekend at the booth. A lot of people came by with questions about growing fruit or to share their own experiences. Keith Borglum brought his solar dryer, one of the ones we built at the workshop a couple of years ago; and it was a great hit. Many people stopped to look at it and ask about getting the plans, and I learned some new methods from people who dried fruit on the roofs of houses and even the dashboards of their cars.



Our booth at the Apple Fair, Gene Dubnik presiding

### **Apple pressings at local farmer's markets:**

Keith Borglum and volunteers from RECRFG worked with the Sonoma County chapter of Slow Food to make apple cider from Gravenstein apples at several farmer's markets in the county. Keith brought our cider press, and Slow Food brought theirs, and volunteers from both groups spent the mornings cutting and pressing apples and handing out samples of cider to visitors.

### **National Heirloom Exposition:**

The second National Heirloom Exposition was held on September 11 through 13 at the Santa Rosa Fairgrounds, and for the second year, RECRFG had a ring of four tables with chapter information and a terrific spread of apples, pears, and other fruit grown by our chapter members, along with some tropical fruit and other curiosities. Particular thanks go to Terry and Carolyn Harrison for the luscious array of apples and pears from their orchard, Barbara and Michael Heiman for bringing packets of dried apples, apricots, and plums as free handouts, Gene Dubnik for bringing grapes every day for visitors to taste, and Harvey Correia of the Sacramento chapter for his contribution of tropical fruit, chestnuts, pomegranates, and other fruit.

Chapter members did shifts staffing our booth, and we were busy almost all the time, chatting with visitors. The Expo featured a huge amount of produce and preserves, often in dazzling displays, seeds and garden items for sale, and films and lectures about sustainable agriculture. Against stiff competition, our booth won a blue ribbon, for the second year.

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

### **Grape tasting, October 20:**

Richard Jeske, who grows 150 varieties of grapes at his home in Willits, will host a grape tasting there on October 20 from noon to 5. About 25 varieties of grapes will be available for tasting, along with about 15 varieties of vines for sale. Participants are welcome to bring their own grapes for tasting, also. For information and directions, call or e-mail Richard at (707) 459-5926 or [easthill@instawave.net](mailto:easthill@instawave.net).

### **RECRFG apple tasting, October 21:**

RECRFG's annual apple tasting will be held this year at the Luther Burbank Gold Ridge Farm, 7781 Bodega Avenue, Sebastopol, from 1:00 to about 4:00. We'll sample and rate about 40 different varieties of apples and also some pears. Parking will be at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, at 500 Robinson Road. As always, volunteers are needed and welcome, to cut up fruit beforehand and during the event.

### **Wolfskill pomegranate and persimmon tasting, November 3:**

The Agricultural Research Station at Wolfskill Ranch will hold its annual pomegranate and persimmon tasting from 10 to about noon, at Wolfskill Ranch, 4334 Putah Creek Road, Winters. The station presents about thirty pomegranate varieties from its extensive collection of fruit from around the world, including samples from the collection of legendary pomegranate researcher Dr. Gregory Levin. If you have only tasted pomegranates from the supermarket, you'll be truly impressed by the range of colors, flavors and even textures of the different varieties. Because November weather is uncertain, the tasting is often held indoors and can be crowded, so it's best to get there at the beginning and be prepared to see a lot of other enthusiasts.

### **Business meeting and election of officers, December 1:**

Come, vote, run for office! Learn about biodynamic winemaking! The Redwood Empire chapter's winter business meeting and election of officers will take place on December 1, at 1:00, at the De Loach Winery, 1791 Olivet Road, Santa Rosa, 95401 (go west on Guerneville Road from Santa Rosa, then right (north) on Olivet).

Under our bylaws, both cochairs, Keith Borglum and Linda Robertson, and our secretary, Geoff Wells, have "termed out" and cannot serve again, so we particularly need candidates for those offices.

Following the official meeting, there will be a lecture/discussion of biodynamic farming by a member of the De Loach staff and a tour of the winery's biodynamic gardens. For those interested, the winery also offers a tasting of three award-winning De Loach wines at a cost of \$10.00 per person. (The tasting is not part of the official RECRFG event, but is available at members' own expense.)

Please RSVP to Keith ([keith@borglum.com](mailto:keith@borglum.com)), so we can give the winery an estimate of the number of attendees at the lecture, tour, and optional tasting.

**A note about the winery and biodynamic farming:**

In 2008 DeLoach Vineyards was awarded organic certification by the CCOF, and began the conversion of 17 acres of estate vineyards from sustainable to biodynamic farming methods within the estate. In 2009 DeLoach received biodynamic certification for both the estate vineyards and 1-acre demonstration garden.

Biodynamics was developed in Germany in the early twentieth century as a reaction to the invention and implementation of the Haber Process, which allows ammonia to be produced from atmospheric nitrogen, and allows the manufacture of synthetic fertilizer. As the use of synthetic fertilizer became more and more widespread throughout Germany, some farmers started to believe there was a decline in food quality. Philosopher, theologian, educator and agricultural expert Rudolph Steiner responded to the farmer's request for guidance with what became the basis of today's biodynamic farming movement. While it embraces many of the same principles as organic farming, biodynamic's controversial approach is to treat the farm as a self-sustaining, living entity that avoids the cycle of dependence on fertilizers and pesticides by maintaining a balanced, diverse ecology. It differs from organic farming in three distinct ways: it treats the farm as a closed, self-contained eco-system and minimizes the use of any external inputs; it utilizes the lunar calendar to guide practices from the vineyard to the cellar; and it utilizes specific natural preparations to improve the health and vitality of the soil.

**Scion exchange, January 26, 2013, at a new location:**

And don't forget to mark your calendars for next year's scion exchange, Saturday, January 26, 2013. Doors open at 9 a.m. for CRFG members, non-members are allowed in at 10, and the festivities end at 1 p.m.

The location of the exchange has changed: this year it will be held at the Santa Rosa Veteran's Building, 1351 Maple Avenue, just across the street from the county fairgrounds.

**Newsletter staff**

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**MULBERRY TASTING AT WOLFSKILL**

*by Linda Robertson*

I missed the fig tasting at the Agricultural Research Station (ARS) at Wolfskill this year, though I heard from people who were there that it was as much fun as always, with interesting talks about the varieties of figs and grapes and some of the research being done at the facility; great food (including Howard Garrisons's terrific barbecued figs with goat cheese and prosciutto); and tours of the grape and fig sections of the research station.

However, I did make it to their earlier tasting of mulberries and early stone fruit, on June 2.

The mulberries were the stars of the event. About ten varieties of mulberries grown at the ranch were set out in bowls for sampling, and Jenny Smith, of the ARS staff, gave a talk about the species of mulberries and the hybrids that have been developed from them.

Jenny Smith described four species of mulberry. *Morus alba*, *Morus nigra*, and *Morus macroura* are all Asian. *Morus rubra* is native to North America; it produces a sour fruit. There are many varieties of *Morus alba*, and despite its name, which translates as "white mulberry," they are generally blackberry-colored, not white. *Morus alba* has been hybridized with *nigra* and *rubra* to produce even more varieties.

The berries we tasted were:

- Gerald Dwarf (*M. alba*/*M. rubra* hybrid)
- Beautiful Day (*M. alba*): berries are white in color
- Illinois Everbearing (*M. alba*/*M. rubra* hybrid)
- Kokuso #20 (*M. alba*)
- Pakistan (*M. macroura*)
- Rupp's Roumania (*M. alba*)
- Shangri-La (*M. alba*/*M. rubra* hybrid)
- Phil's White (*Morus alba*): another white berry
- Thompson (*Morus alba*)
- Unnamed hybrid of *M. alba* and *M. nigra*

The popular favorites, judging from conversations at the tasting table and the relative emptiness of the bowls at the end of the morning, were Pakistan and Illinois Everbearing. They were my favorites, too; their flavor reminded me of the sweet, blackcurrant flavor of the berries from a street tree I used to raid when I was in grade school.

Because mulberries are so fragile, their commercial use is limited. The ARS staff experimented with drying berries in a dehydrator, as a potential method of preserving them for sale. At the event, they set up a blind tasting of eight varieties of dried mulberries. Participants were asked to rate them on a form. The results will be tabulated and distributed.



**Mulberries**

In addition to the mulberries, we tried two varieties of early peach and one apricot.

- “Florida Prince,” a small yellow cling peach with a tangy, intensely peachy flavor.
- “Springtime” a small, sweet, low-acid white peach.
- “Tyrinthos” the apricot.

The ARS staff had hoped to offer a tasting of cherries, but their crop was wiped out by an infestation of the glassy-winged sharpshooter.

More information about mulberry varieties and where they grow can be found in Fruit Facts on the CRFG web page: <http://www.crfg.org/pubs/ff/mulberry.html>

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## RECIPE: GRAPE CRISP

*Linda Robertson*

Looking for ways to deal with a large bag of underripe supermarket grapes, I researched recipes on the Internet and came up with several for grape crisp. I drew some elements from each and came up with the following:

### Filling

- About 8 cups of seedless grapes
- 1/4 cup of honey
- 1/2 cup of dessert wine, such as port (or 1/4 c. of cognac and 1/4 cup water)
- 1/2 tsp. cinnamon
- 2 tablespoons of cornstarch dissolved in 1/4 cup water

### Crisp

- 1/2 cup oats
- 1/2 cup flour
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1/4 cup butter
- 1/2 tsp. cinnamon
- 1/4 cup chopped almonds or walnuts

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Cut the grapes in half, and put them in a heavy saucepan with the honey, wine and cinnamon. Mix in the cornstarch and water. Cook over medium heat, stirring, until the liquid has thickened somewhat.

Make the crisp topping by mixing the dry ingredients and then rubbing the butter into them until it's incorporated.

Spray an 8-inch square pan with cooking spray and pour the grape mixture into it. Top with the crisp. Cover the pan with foil and bake for 10 minutes, then remove the foil and bake for 15-20 minutes more, or until the fruit is bubbling and the crisp topping is lightly browned.

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A short item from THE PRESS DEMOCRAT:

100 pineapples later, growing the fruit still as sweet

By CHRIS SMITH

Saturday, March 17, 2012

Several times a year, it's Pineapple Day at Howard and Joyce Groocock's country home on the edge of Windsor. Their recent one was special.

Howard, who'll turn 84 in June, sliced into the 100th pineapple that he's harvested from the lean-to growroom affixed to the garage. Mmm, sweet. And growing it took him only about three years.

The retired Optical Coating Labs inspector, volunteer firefighter and Windsor school board member got started in the unusual hobby nearly 20 years ago. He was motivated by having locals far more savvy than he about climate-appropriate agriculture tell him he'd have to be nuts to try to grow pineapples in hardly tropical Sonoma County.

"I'm stubborn," Howard allowed. Ask him the key to successfully growing 100 pineapples — most of them quite tasty — in pots in a plastic-walled shed warmed at night by a light bulb beneath a metal bucket, and he shrugs.

"I don't know anything about growing pineapples," he said. His wife of 51 years nodded.

"It's very unscientific," Joyce said.