



Redwood Empire Chapter Newsletter

October, 2011

THE HEIRLOOM FESTIVAL

by Linda Robertson

The Redwood Empire chapter was well represented at the first ever Heirloom Festival on September 13-15, at the Santa Rosa Fairgrounds. The event, which was organized by Baker Creek Seeds in Petaluma, was an impressive show of organic food and agriculture, with over 250 exhibitors and vendors.

Phil Pieri organized our chapter exhibit, signing up volunteers to bring fruit for display and to staff the exhibit during the three days of the fair, and supervising setting up and taking down. Thanks to his work and members' contributions, our exhibit was really impressive. We had four long tables arranged in a square. One table held plates of pears and sorbus, another apples, the third subtropicals and miscellaneous fruits and nuts, and the fourth *Fruit Gardener* magazines, copies of the chapter newsletter, membership forms, and a couple of informational posters of fruit. Most of the apples and pears were brought by Terry and Carolyn Harrison, and many of the subtropicals, with some pomegranates and chestnuts, came from Harvey Correia of the Sacramento chapter. All in all, we probably had at least 80 varieties on display. The Monterey and Golden Gate chapters had tables near ours, Monterey's with an array of apples and Golden Gate's with a display of subtropical plants.

The festival, and our tables, had a lot more visitors than we expected. We answered questions, compared notes about orchards, and gave away all the membership forms, past *Fruit Gardeners*, and copies of recent newsletters that we had. Fortunately, Barbara Heiman had the ingenious idea of packing small baggies of fruit dried by her husband, Michael, putting labels on them with our chapter logo and web address, and handing them out as free samples. These were also used up, but they gave us some more informational material for people interested in learning more about CRFG and our chapter.

A film crew from the Martha Stewart show was at the festival and took some footage of our exhibit and Monterey's. The segment was aired in their September 28 episode, available on line at this link:

<http://www.marthastewart.com/856609/harvest-show-emeril-lagasse>

Our chapter's display won two festival awards: best fruit display and reserve grand champion exhibit.

Since we didn't know the exhibits were being judged, this was a happy surprise.

I think everyone who came by and helped at the chapter's exhibit had a good time meeting people, talking shop, and raising awareness of the great fruit that can be grown here in Sonoma County in backyard orchards.

Saving tomato seeds: While I was manning the tables on Wednesday, one visitor passed along this method for saving tomato seeds for planting. Cut the tops off the tomatoes to expose the seed chambers. Squeeze the seeds from the chamber and some pulp into a jar. Leave the jar of seeds and pulp in a warm place for about five days, ignoring the mold and fruit flies it will attract. At the end of that time, the seeds will have sunk to the bottom of the jar. Pour the top layer of liquid off, leaving the seeds and remaining pulp. Pour or scoop the seeds and pulp from the bottom of the jar into a fine-meshed strainer. Rinse the pulpy goop off the seeds, and put the cleaned seeds onto a plate or similar flat surface to dry. Once they're dry, store them for planting.

This fermenting procedure takes the gummy protective coating off the seeds, making germination easier.



Our Prize

THE GREAT FIG DRYING EXPERIMENT

Linda Robertson

Last year at the Wolfskill fig and grape tasting, I picked more figs in their orchard than I could comfortably eat and ended up drying some in my Nesco dryer. The results were mixed, and some were a lot better than others, but since I'd collected the figs pretty randomly, I had no idea which were which. So this year I decided to try an experiment, drying identifiable varieties to see how they worked.

So during the orchard tour that followed this year's fig tasting I went armed with ziplock bags and a sharpie. I picked a few (up to 5) of a dozen varieties which were ripe at the time, putting each type in its own labelled baggie. At home, I cut them into quarters, assigned each variety its place on a dryer tray, with paper labels, and dried them for about 24 hours. After letting them sit in jars overnight I tasted each type, in the spirit of scientific inquiry. Over the next few weeks I returned and randomly tasted each one a couple more times.

Ideally, I should have solicited a panel of tasters, but there was no panel handy. It was a pretty unscientific test anyway: the samples were pretty small, and the figs weren't all at the same stage of ripeness (and – full disclosure – I wasn't feeling inclined to share them.) So what follows is an entirely personal set of opinions. There were, I felt, a couple of winners and losers in the group, but most of them were at least acceptable. Here's what I thought of each:

– **Aked:** almost sticky, chewy, seeds a bit crunchy. Subtle fig flavor, intensely sweet, with musky, slightly fermented overtone. and a hint of acidity counterbalancing the sweet. After a couple of days it was a little softer and very likeable. One of the best of the group.

– **Blanquette:** Fruit was quite dry, beyond leathery. Seeds crunched. Sweet, but without any particular flavor beyond a slight grassiness.

– **Dauphine:** Nice texture: leathery, chewy and sweet, with a hint of almond. Seeds were hardly noticeable.

– **Ischia Black:** I had only 2 figs for drying. The pieces had a faint but definite smell almost like port wine. They were chewy, sweet but with a hint of acidity, distinctly flavored with complex wine, honey, and musky overtones. Maybe not for everyone, but quite interesting. The small sample makes it difficult to say if these were representative.

– **Kadota:** Both pieces I ate were chewy and sweet, with slightly musky overtone. Skin was quite tough, seeds were barely noticeable, just enough to add a pleasant crunch.

– **King:** skin tough and leathery, inside moist and tenderer than the others. Sweet, fairly pronounced grassy flavor but not figgy.

– **Native d'Argentuil:** The first piece I tasted was dried almost to crispness and had no flavor. Others were

much better, with a dry skin but an almost succulent interior. Both had an interesting bit of tartness that offset the sweetness of the dried fruit. Subtle fig flavor, crunchy seeds.

– **Osborn's Prolific:** Chewy, moist, a little seedy; sweet with slight musky and toasty overtones, no complexity of flavor.

– **Pied de Boeuf:** First piece was crunchy with no flavor or sweetness. Others were chewy, sweet with a hint of tart, slight but not unpleasant fermented musky overtone. Didn't feel overly thick-skinned or seedy.

– **Violette de Bordeaux:** stayed chewy, seeds a bit crunchy. Sweet with a slight toasty overtone, not much flavor. (Nice enough dried, but much better fresh!)

– **White Genoa:** chewy, sweet, but not intensely so, with a hint of tart; crunchy seeds; slightly tough skin; slight grassy flavor.

– **Yellow Neches:** dried pretty hard, though still chewy (possibly because it's a small fruit). Intensely sweet with a hint of tart, subtle figgy taste with a bit of musk. Another fig that was better fresh than dried.

SIMPLE SALT CURED OLIVES

This recipe comes from a man who sells olives and honey at the Galleria Farmer's Market in San Francisco.

Ingredients:

Kalamata (or similar) olives
Kosher salt

Mix the olives with 1/3 their weight in kosher salt. Put the olives and salt into an old pillow case or a piece of an old sheet. Tie the bag shut and put it into a colander or strainer placed in a bowl. Every day or so, pick up the bag and massage the olives and salt for about a minute or so to keep them mixed. After awhile the olives will start to give up their bitter juice and get wrinkly, and after about 3 or 4 weeks, they should lose enough bitterness to be edible. To use them, soak the amount of olives you will need in very hot water for about a minute. Then season them with olive oil and anything else you like.

To preserve them for later use, coat them lightly with canola oil and freeze them. The oil keeps them separated so they will pour easily from the container.

UPCOMING EVENTS

RECRFG Apple Tasting: October 16, noon to 4:00, at Terry and Carolyn Harrison's Foxwhelp Farm, in Healdsburg. Potluck lunch followed by sampling and rating of apples.

Directions to Foxwhelp Farm 4395 Westside Road, Healdsburg, CA 95448-9359 (707) 433-6802. From West Sonoma County take hwy 116 out of Sebastopol. Turn right at the drive-in in Forestville onto Covey Lane. At the stop sign at the end of Covey Lane, turn right onto Trenton. Drive on Trenton for a block, then make a half right at the stop sign onto River Road. Take River Road for a block, then turn left on Wohler Road, cross Wohler Bridge and immediately turn right onto Westside Road. About 1.5 miles past Hop Kiln Winery, look for 4395 on top of a green mail box on the left. Turn onto that road and drive 0.7 miles to the end, past 3 houses and across a concrete bridge.

Festival of Fruit, 2011: Year of the Pomegranate: November 3-6. There's still time to register for this year's Festival. Registration information and details about the festival and tours are available at <http://www.azrfg.org/festivalOfFruit/fof.html>

Wolfskill Pomegranate and Persimmon Tasting: November 12, 2012, from 10:00 a.m. to about noon, at Wolfskill Ranch, 4334 Putah Creek Road, Winters, CA.

RECRFG Annual Meeting and Election of Officers: December, 2012, date and time TBD.

Scion Exchange: January 28, 2012, at the Veteran's Hall, 282 South High Street, Sebastopol. Members-only from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00, general public admitted from 10:00 to 1:30.

RECRFG has an events calendar on Google. Members can find information on upcoming events, both in our chapter and elsewhere, on Keith Borglum's chapter web page, <http://www.borglum.com/crfg/>. If you know of an event other chapter members might be interested in, contact our events coordinator, Tony Bryhan, at abryhan@comcast.net, to add it to the calendar.

BOOK REVIEW

The Quarter-Acre Farm

By Spring Warren (Seal Press, 2011)

Reviewed by Linda Robertson

One of the problems I've sometimes had with articles and books about home gardening is that they're so earnest. The authors lecture their readers in intimidating detail about mulching, composting, fertilizing, pruning, and so forth, with no sympathy for the possibility that some of us are disorganized, careless, slapdash, or just plain hapless when it comes to growing things. Spring Warren's *The Quarter Acre Farm* is the opposite; it is, like the slogan on the Dummies books (*Word for Dummies*, *Spanish for Dummies*, and so forth), "a reference for the rest of us."

The Quarter Acre Farm is the story of a project the author embarked on a few years ago to turn her suburban yard in Davis into gardens that would supply 75 percent of her family's food. Her husband and her two sons, who courageously agreed to go along with the experiment, also figure largely in the book, sometimes skeptical, but also contributing help and creative ideas for solving problems. Starting from the beginning, Spring takes the reader through the first year: planning the gardens, preparing the soil, planting, weeding, watering, mulching, and then harvesting. She also tends several mature fruit trees and acquires a flock of chickens along the way, in addition to her two pet geese. As she finds out, all of it involves a learning curve.

With a lot of humor at her own expense, she lets us in on her failures as well as her successes, and her adventures in learning things the hard way. One chapter is devoted to her attempts to convince a bed of reluctant tomato plants to set fruit before discovering that the soil in her area was rife with nematodes; the story ends happily with her getting a bumper crop the next year by planting resistant varieties and using all the good advice about watering, fertilizing and pruning she had learned trying to save her first crop. Part of another chapter describes an ill-thought-out project of planting pumpkins on trellises, with predictable results.

Besides being fun to read, *The Quarter Acre Farm* includes a lot of good advice, not just about gardening, but also about such things as creative ways of freezing produce (shredded zucchini hockey pucks, for example), and it features a recipe after each chapter.

If you're a new gardener or, like me, a hopeless one, or if you're an experienced and successful gardener who might get a laugh out of remembering some of your early missteps and mishaps, I think you'll thoroughly enjoy this book.