



LOS ANGELES CHAPTER

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<http://www.crfg-la.org>

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MEETING

Topic: Organic Fruit Tree Growing & Soil Enrichment presented by Richard Richie
Date: Saturday, July 26, 10:00 a.m.
Location: Sepulveda Garden Center

Randy and Norma Ritchie of Grow REAL Organic (growrealorganic.com), will talk about what it truly means to grow organic fruit trees. Randy is a garden designer and an expert at composting. He has written several best-selling books which teach gardeners how to have a much healthier approach towards gardening. Norma is a Certified Soil Advisor and an Orchardist whose passion is to teach about growing real organic soil, healing and removing toxins in the soil, and creating closed loop organic systems at home.

Potluck time! Everyone, please bring a snack which can be shared after the presentation.

MEETING

Topic: Tour of Paradise Nursery & Presentation on How To Grow Unusual Fruit Varieties in Southern California
Date: Saturday, August 23, 10 a.m.
Location: Chatsworth

Paradise Nursery has specialized in growing the highest quality fruit trees and edible plants in Southern California for over 25 years. They are experts at growing in a Mediterranean climate. They can teach how to solve plant problems and advise which plants would thrive around your home. Their nursery offers a huge collection of different types of unique and special fruits from around the world.

This event is for Members only, please. Because this is a tour, there will be no potluck.

Save the date!

CALENDAR FOR L.A. CHAPTER 2025

September 27 Biocontrol & Beneficial Insects presented by Ron Whitehurst
October 25 Patio Tree & Small Space Gardening for the Kitchen (heirloompotager.com)
November 22 TBD
December 20 Holiday Party at Sepulveda Gardens

LOOKING BACK

By Deborah Oisboid

May 17 - Dragon fruit

If you like dragonfruit, you should have attended our May meeting. Alik Shulman, owner of the Shulman Dragonfruit Orchard in Thousand Oaks, entertained and enlightened us with stories about this wonderful fruit. He talked about the best way to grow dragonfruit, how to pollinate them and create new varieties, all sprinkled with his own colorful tales. (Plus, he brought some dragonfruit plants for sale.)

Alik became fascinated by cactus when he was 8 years old living in the Ukraine. His friend was growing some beautiful, exotic cactus flowers in the middle of winter. He went to the market, bought some cactus seeds, and when they sprouted for him, he was hooked!



Wherever he lived, he always had some cactus on a windowsill. So when he moved to Thousand Oaks, he immediately went shopping! At a local Orchard Supply Hardware store, he bought a plant which was called "Laverne." He didn't know what it was, so he planted it with other cactus on his property.

He grew the new cactus in a tomato cage until he figured out a better structure for it. Eventually he built a wooden trellis, and the cactus grew to be about 12 feet tall. And eventually there was a flower! Then 10 to 20 flowers! Alik was delighted, but he only sometimes got fruit from the flowers, so he started researching.

About that time the world was locked down to slow the spread of a new, dangerous virus called COVID. Suddenly there was plenty of time for research. He learned that his Laverne plant originated at the LaVerne Nursery in Piru. (Sadly, the nursery is now closed at that location.) He learned his particular variety of dragonfruit was not self-fertile, but needed cross pollination with another dragonfruit.

He reached out on the internet and met Eyal Givon, another dragonfruit enthusiast in Moorpark, who had

collected pollen from his own plants. Alik described the transaction as if it were a drug deal: "Give me that little bag of white powder!" He touched all his flowers with the powder and suddenly he had fruit all over the place! He calls it the best drug deal he ever made.

Alik has a Facebook page and started a YouTube channel about 4 years ago. He met many other dragonfruit enthusiasts online. Between purchases and trades, he now owns between 50 - 60 different varieties of dragonfruit and can cross-pollinate to his heart's content.

History & Pollination

Dragonfruit is very healthy, and contains vitamin A, vitamin C, several B-vitamins, calcium, phosphorus, antioxidants, and fiber. Plus, it is delicious!

The first red dragonfruit variety was developed about 47 years ago. Paul Thompson and Edgar Valdivia were some of the biggest developers of new fruit. They started cross-pollinating to create new varieties with such exotic names as American Beauty, Purple Haze, Physical Graffiti, and Sugar Dragon.

Alik absolutely loves Laverne Red because the flavor is good and it produces huge fruit, sometimes as much as 2 pounds!

How do you make a new variety? Start with the flower from one variety and add pollen from another variety. Now you have a "mother" and a "father." The "kids" won't look quite like the mom or exactly like the dad - they'll be a little bit like each.

Dragonfruit flowers are "true," which means they have both stigma and anthers. If the stigma is too far away, the pollen won't reach the anther. Also, the flowers only open for one night so you have a limited time to pollinate them.

Yellow Palora (white with yellow skin), Sugar Dragon (red flesh), and American Beauty (purple flesh) varieties are all self-pollinating. Other varieties reject their own pollen and must be cross pollinated to produce fruit. Sugar Dragon, although a very small duck-egg sized fruit, is considered a universal pollinator, so it's a good idea to keep one around!

Alik pollinates his vines late at night, around 10:00 or 11:00 p.m. He uses a small keyboard vacuum to pull pollen from all the different flowers. Another way to collect pollen is to tap the flower over an open jar.

Alik likes to reach out to other growers and ask if their plants are flowering, then "borrow" some of their pollen.

He returns the favor when his own flowers open.

Alik keeps a desiccant pack with his stored dragonfruit pollen to absorb moisture and prevent rot. He stores the pollen in a freezer. He recommends removing pollen from the freezer and opening the container 15 to 20 minutes before pollinating. Shake it to mix the grains and make sure they are not clumped together. Use a small makeup brush and place a few grains of pollen so they enter the pipe of the anther.

If you are successful, in 3 to 5 days the bottom of the stigma should start swelling and stay green. Alik usually marks on each branch the letter "b" for bud, "p" for pollinate, and the date. He waits 30 to 35 days from pollination before harvesting.

Some dragonfruit varieties will produce three to five times per year. Sugar Dragon will start flowering in May. By the end of May, the flowers open and Alik begins pollinating. It takes 35 days from bud to fully open flower, then another 30 days for fruit to ripen. At the end of June, he harvests and begins another cycle in July. And another cycle in August. Some years Alik will even get fruit in March!

The flowers are beautiful and very fragrant, you can sometimes smell them from 20 to 50 ft away! Sometimes he has to wear a mask when he's pollinating because the scent becomes overwhelming.

In Mexico, people cook the fresh flower petals. But they leave the stigma behind so the fruit will still grow.

Planters, trellises, and soil

It's a good idea to plan support for your vine before you plant dragonfruit. The vines will grow very fast and it is difficult to put a structure in afterwards.

Alik's preferred structure uses a central 4x4 post which supports a 4 foot square frame. The entire structure stands 5 feet tall for ease of access, although he admits he still needs a ladder to pollinate the topmost flowers.

He uses stretchy green garden tape to tie the dragonfruit vines to the post. The tape expands slightly as the vines grow.

His Orchard in Thousand Oaks contains rows of 40-gallon wooden planters, each containing about 7 cubic feet of soil. Their internal trellises are embedded in a cinder block to help support them vertically.

Dragonfruit come from a tropical climate and they like to grab onto trees with their "air roots." The air roots also

capture moisture from the air.

Alik mixes his base soil with compost and then chicken or horse manure in a ratio of 5/3/1/1: 50% soil, 30% compost, 10% manure, and 10% sand or fine rocks. He tops it off with compost/mulch. And perlite is good for aeration. Cactus mix is also good

Alik advises that when you first put soil into a large container, do not fill it up before watering. Water it as you put the soil in, in layers. Otherwise, you will have the outside wet and the inside completely dry. Top the soil with at least 2 inches of mulch to prevent evaporation, and add nutrients as it breaks down.

Make sure to drill drainage holes! You should also raise the pot so water can drain out. Otherwise it is just sitting in a puddle at the bottom, which could drown the plant. The soil has to drain and dry between waterings.



Alik is still working out the watering system for his orchard. Right now everything gets watered by hand because he doesn't want to hang pipes across the top of the support structures.

The root system of dragonfruit is not very deep. From the top of the ground, the roots extend roughly a foot down and mostly go sideways. The bigger the container, the better the soil, and the better and healthier the roots.

Soil should have a neutral pH of about 7. If you are growing dragonfruit in a container, you should feed them every two to three months. Alik likes Kellogg's Organic brands. Alaska brand fertilizer is also good because it has fish emulsion, very high in nitrogen. He starts feeding his plants in springtime, as new branches start forming.

When the plants are starting to grow, he waters them once per week (depending on the weather). If it's cold, he may skip a week to ensure the soil dries out in between

watering. They don't like soggy soil. If the top 2-3 inches is dry then it's time to add water. In summer, his Orchard waters once or twice a week.

Propagation and weather

You can take a cutting and plant it directly in the soil and within months you should see it start to grow. To make a new plant, cut about a foot of vine and allow the sliced end to dry out for a few days. Plant the cutting and keep it in a shady area where it doesn't get too cold (in winter). As it grows, you can move it into a bigger container or into the ground.

Alik will sometimes put umbrellas up during the rainy season to keep his vines from drowning. Dragonfruit do not like cold weather and will die back in a frost or freezing weather. Fortunately, he doesn't get very much frost because his orchard is close to the ocean. If a frost is predicted, he might wrap plastic around everything to keep the plants warm.

In summertime, the vines can become sunburned if they are exposed to too much direct sunlight. So he brings out the umbrellas again. Alik spray paints his umbrellas and says they have lasted many seasons instead of just one or two. Although dragonfruit need sun, the umbrella-shaded plants still get plenty of reflected sunlight from the sides.

Dragonfruit are susceptible to fungus, which can spread like crazy across thickly vining plants. The most common fungus looks like rust. Alik uses copper fungicide and neem oil to stop fungal growth. If a branch is really damaged, he will cut it off. He says the sun is the best healer.

Alik emphasized the need to clean tools when moving between plants, because you don't want to spread any diseases between them. He uses Lysol disinfectant on his tools, especially when he's finished with one plant and moving on to the next one.

It was a lot of information to absorb, so Alik refreshed us all with delicious dragonfruit lemonade made from fresh



dragonfruit, organic lemons, sugar, water, and ice.

After the presentation, we had a delightful potluck with hummus, several types of salads and slaws, freshly

picked lemon guavas and tangerines and loquats and

mulberries, strawberries, mixed nuts, a yummy birria, and some amazing cakes and cookies and other sweets for desserts. A delicious end to a delicious presentation!

Many thanks to Alik Shulman for sharing his knowledge with us. If you are interested in touring his Orchard, it is located in Thousand Oaks and is open on Sunday between 8:00 am and 1:00 pm. Reservations are recommended.

June 28 - Humongous Plant Sale

Our annual fundraiser this year was a HUGE success! We had a Propagating Committee which started several cuttings and seeds for the sale earlier in the year, and there was a huge advertising effort to bring in the public.

The day of the event was quite well organized, with members bringing in their donated plants ahead of time so they could be priced and labelled. The tables were set up so the flow of foot traffic let everyone meander past all of the plants before reaching the payment table at the other door.

Our sale was organized in conjunction with a free milkweed giveaway by the Santa Monica Mountain Conservancy. They had a tent set up on the lawn in front of our meeting room. It was a mutually beneficial arrangement because customers could purchase the exotic CRFG-LA plants and then pick up free milkweed plants, or vice versa.

The event began with plant expert and wonderfully generous donor, Charles Portney, taking everyone on a "plant tour" to introduce them to the wonderful and unusual offerings, many of which people had never seen nor heard of before.



In addition to fruit trees and vines, vegetables, herbs, flowers, cacti and succulents, and ornamental plants, there were other things for sale such as posters, magazines, books, a 5-tray worm bin, dried lemon verbena, a "salsa garden" in an egg carton (seeds and instructions), and a lovely set of silver plate serving dishes.

Plants for sale included: "hairy snake" fern (for aquariums), "papri-mild" paprika seeds, African violets, airplane plants, akebia, aloe vera, sweet alyssum, grafted fruit trees (apples, avocados, stone fruit, figs, mulberries,

and persimmons), artichokes and cardoon, bananas, Barbados gooseberries, blackberries, blue butterfly peas, California Live Oak, canna flowers, cape gooseberries, cardoon, cherimoya, cherry of the Rio Grande, Chinese (or possibly Siberian) elm, chocolate mint, climbing roses, Cocoa (cacao) seedlings, culinary and Thai ginger (galangal), cyclamen, daylily, dragonfruit, elderberries, epazote, eugenia, "False Dusty Miller" (*Centaurea gymnocarpa*), fennel, flowering hibiscus, gac fruit vine, giant rhubarb, goji berry, grapes, grumichama, guavas, haworthia, hibiscus shrubs, ice cream bean (*Inga edulis*), jackfruit, jade plants, jelly vine, kalanchoe, lilli pilli, longevity spinach, loquats, mammillaria orchid cactus, many sage varieties (white, purple, black, red, pineapple), Medusa's head euphorbia, Okinawa spinach, papaya, paper spine cactus, peperomia, pepinos, plumeria, pom pom (mimosa) trees, prickly pear cactus ("tunas"), rose apple, rose cactus, roselle hibiscus, rosemary, round squash, several varieties of sansevieria (snake plants), sapote, Sarracenia pitcher plant, scented geraniums, squill, staghorn fern, stapelia (starfish flower), string-of-bananas succulent, string-of-hearts succulent, sugar cane, tamarillo (tree tomato), thyme, turmeric, ubajay, various hoyas, various tiny succulents, Venus fly trap, winter jasmine, yarrow, and many more!



Got all that? If not, come to our sale next year!!

People had a good time, found some interesting plants to take home, and had terrific manners! It was an extremely successful event and we thank all the people who made it possible, especially our generous donors who include Charles Portney, Deborah Oisboid Margaret Frane, Lydia and Reza Shabestari, Christine Warren, Brad Golstein, Laura Valenziano, Mark Steele, Steve List/Stefan Strong and the students of Sylmar High School.

Special thanks to Art Fitzsimmons and Eve Guth/Ed Livingston who handled a tremendous amount of transportation, Lydia Shabestari for initiating the Propagating Committee, Art Fitzsimmons, David Payton,

and Laura Valenziano for handling all the sales, Karen Payton for customer intake, and Kathleen Doran went to great efforts creating and hanging a huge reusable banner to advertise the sale. Also, many thanks to our friendly, brand new member, James Rife, who brought several rare plants he had rooted especially for the sale. And James stayed and helped us with cleanup!

Heartfelt thanks to very special others who often do us the favor of volunteering, which is always both considerable and indispensable! They are time-tested, generous Chapter Members Flora Agpalo, Bruce and Margery Blavin, Brad Golstein, and Laura Valenziano, without whose participation things would never have gone so smoothly and successfully!



Bad News on the Huanglongbing (HLB) Front

Huanglongbing (HLB) Quarantine Boundary Expansion - Riverside County - Perris Area

Effective July 1, 2025, the CDFA is expanding the HLB quarantine boundary in the Perris area of Riverside County in grid 472. A map of the expanded boundary can be found at

www.cdfa.ca.gov/citrus/pests_diseases/hlb/regulation.html.

Also effective July 1, 2025, the Department is expanding the Asian Citrus Psyllid Bulk Citrus Regional Quarantine Zone 6 in the Perris area of Riverside County to reflect the HLB quarantine boundary expansion. A map of the expanded boundary can be found at

www.cdfa.ca.gov/citrus/pests_diseases/acp/regulation.html.