



LOS ANGELES CHAPTER

2021 Volume XXVI Issue 3

CRFG-LA meetings at Sepulveda Garden Center are currently suspended. We hope everyone is staying safe and healthy.

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

2021 Chapter Officers & Committees

Chairman: Jerry Schwartz	chairman@CRFG-la.org
Vice Chairman:	co-chair@CRFG-la.org
Treasurer: K.Payton	treasurer@CRFG-la.org 818-222-7556
Secretary: Margaret Frane	hospitality@CRFG-la.org 310-429-9455
Newsletter Editor: Deborah Oisboid	editor@CRFG-la.org
Program Chairman: Anwar Hachache	program@CRFG-la.org 714-822-7224
Photographer:	photo@CRFG-la.org
Historian: Emory Walton	historian@CRFG-la.org 805-497-8835
Food Coordinator: Chris Warren	food@CRFG-la.org 818-362-8537
Plant Sales Chairman: David Payton	plants@CRFG-la.org 818-222-7556
Members at Large: Eve Guth	atlarge@CRFG-la.org
Emeritus Members: Pat Valdivia Edgar Valdivia	edpitaya@gmail.com

ZOOM MEETING:

Saturday, May 22, 10:00 am

Host: Mark Steele's Garden

Topic: Virtual Garden Tour of Home Orchard

Mark Steele is a CSUN professor of Marine Biology and a longtime member of CRFG and our chapter. In 2012, his "banana obsession" brought him to CRFG, and in 2016 he gave the chapter an excellent talk on the subject. Mark will be welcoming us to his home orchard, where he'll talk about the many fruits he grows. He'll show us bananas, figs, cherimoya, citrus, avocado, loquat, passionfruit, strawberry guava, stone fruits (plum, pluot, peach, nectarine, apricot, mulberry, coffee and Surinam cherry). He describes his yard as small; many of his trees are multi-grafted, which allows him to try more varieties. One tree has over a hundred grafts!

ZOOM MEETING:

Saturday, June 26, 10:00 am

Speaker: Dr. Ben Faber

Topic: A Conversation with Dr. Ben Faber

Ben Faber is the soils/water/subtropical crops advisor for Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties. His primary crop involvements are avocado and citrus, but he also covers other subtropical and deciduous crops such as litchi, longan, passion fruit, blueberries, and cherimoya. He is currently evaluating various subtropical tree varieties for their economic viability in coastal environments. He also studies soil and water quality issues, such as erosion management, salinity management, orchard floor management, irrigation scheduling, and fertility management. Ben has his Ph.D. in soil fertility and M.S. in pomology. What rare fruits does Dr. Faber recommend growing in SoCal? Bring your questions for this living rare fruit expert to answer!

CALENDAR FOR LA CHAPTER 2021

July 24	George Campos - Virtual garden tour
August 28	Ross Radi - Wonderful World of Figs
Sept 25	Dr. Niamh Quinn - Ground Squirrels in the home garden
October 23	Bill Brandt - Virtual garden tour
Nov 20	Dr Shengrui Yao - Jujubes
Dec 18	Holiday Party

Words From Our Chairman

By Jerry Schwartz



In March I received a request for a CRFG Zoom presentation from Rick Perillo. Rick is the gardening instructor at MUSE, a virtual online school in Calabasas. Their tenth grade students wanted to learn about exotic fruit trees.

I contacted our own CRFG Zoom guru, Margaret Frane, who gave a thumbs-up and arranged a session. The B's - Bruce Blavin and Bill Brant - were then contacted to make the presentation. They agreed and held a 45 minute Zoom.

On April 12th, the fruit tree yards of Bill, Bruce, and myself were Zoomed in on. The students saw a fantastic variety of fruiting plants. At the end of the presentation, the students asked a multitude of questions. The next day I gave Rick Perillo some Fruit Gardner magazines for his 10th grade gardening students. In the future, CRFG should hold Zoom presentations with Sylmar High and other schools.

Meanwhile, as promised in January, CRFG-LA is having its Greatest LIVE IN PERSON PLANT SALE on JUNE 19th. Members: come all! See long lost friends and buy the plants you've been desiring! Charles Portney has generously donated well over 100 plants. Please follow his lead and bring all your extra potted fruit plants. All will have a great time.

Jerry

LOOKING BACK

By Deborah Oisboid, Editor

March - Pruning Videos with Tom Spellman & Alex Silber

This was an interesting meeting. Instead of having a guest speaker, we shared some videos by Tom Spellman of Dave Wilson Nursery, and Alex Silber of Papaya Tree Nursery. Tom showed us how to identify fruit-bearing branches, and demonstrated winter pruning techniques. Alex discussed cherimoya tree care and pruning.

Things started a little bit later than usual because there was a lot of socializing and general catching-up.

But first things come first - **Congratulations to Anwar Hachache, our new Program Chair!** He will be taking over where Pat Valdivia left off. There is a lot of work to be done planning meetings, arranging locations, and confirming speakers. We are definitely looking forward to some wonderful new speakers and events arranged by Anwar!

We also met our newest CRFG member, Mike Yamato, and welcomed back long-time members George Campos and Majid Haghoo, who hadn't been able to join our Meetings-From-A-Distance until recently.

Edgar Valdivia congratulated those who kept things going through the pandemic last year and expressed hope we can meet in person again soon. He pointed to one advantage of the lockdowns - we have had more time to work in our gardens!

Deborah Oisboid suggested continuing to transmit the meetings by Zoom even after we restart meeting in person. Meetings could be used to draw in new members - they would be able to see good stuff and good plants and good food and good people - and then sign up.

There was some discussion about our plant sale. Karen explained how our plant sales (auctions) work at our in-person meetings. All the plants are lined up around the room, and people write bids on paper tags for the plants they want. Highest bidder wins the plant.

Pat Valdivia wanted to know what's being planned for this year's Festival of Fruit? Margaret Frane said it's sponsored by the Redwood City chapter of CRFG. If it happens, the Festival will be held in August. There had been talk of holding it via Zoom, which would allow attendees to go to a lot more meetings instead of limiting them to two or three.

After about half an hour of chapter business (and some general socializing), Margaret Frane showed us two videos by Tom Spellman of Dave Wilson Nursery: What to prune, and then How to prune.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jwKvH-YsGvk>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DoxXQYS9qcM>

The first video described the difference between fruiting and non-fruiting branches. Some fruit trees fruit on this year's wood, some on last year's growth. Peaches and nectarines are produced on last year's new growth.

New branches are brighter and smoother than older growth, especially on stone fruit trees (peaches, plums, apricots, etc). Younger growth is often lighter in color as well. Stone fruits typically grow their heaviest crops on 1 - 2 year old wood. Trim back the older wood to provide room for the younger, more vigorous growth. Try to save as much of the young wood as possible.

Winter pruning is focused on the general structure of the tree. Crossed branches and deadwood are removed, the center is opened. Central branches of a tree may be removed to bring the sun in. This also allows access for harvesting, as well as future pruning. Some of the younger fruiting branches may be removed to improve fruit quality - too many fruit means smaller fruit. Finally, the height of the tree may be reduced so you don't need huge ladders to harvest everything. Even if the upper branches are young fruit-producers, there should still be plenty of young growth below, and trees usually respond well to this type of pruning.

You should walk all the way around a tree, looking for young, vigorous growth. Thin out clusters with 3-5 branches coming out of one joint: reduce them to 1 or 2 branches. This also creates areas for new vigor.

When trimming, Tom does not cut a branch flush with the trunk. He leaves a small stub to seal itself without damaging the parent branch.

Should you seal the new cuts? Tom personally thinks they heal better without an asphalt or wax seal, but if you want to, then go ahead, it won't do any harm. He typically makes about 10-12 major cuts per tree in winter, working from inside to outside, then outside to inside. He notes that pruning is never going to be finished - it's like an artist's canvas. You keep going back later and adjust it. If you decide to correct a cut later, that's great. He insists there is no right or

wrong, it's what YOU want.

Tom said that even if you end up taking out 75% of the tree you will get bigger better fruit later. The tree can provide more energy to fewer fruit.

Sometimes you need to prune back the vigorous growth to allow other parts of a tree to grow, especially on a multiple-grafted tree.

Moving on to summer pruning - this is usually done after fruit have been harvested. It is done for height control, as compared to winter pruning for structure.

While pruning a pomegranate tree in winter, Tom noted mummified fruit left over from the previous summer's crop. He strongly advises NOT to compost mummy fruit, as it could spread unseen infections and pests. It's better to get spent fruit off the property!

If you're not into pruning, there are other options. For example, choose a Dwarf variety over a standard tree.

Should you feed and prune your tree at the same time? Someone pointed out you shouldn't feed a tree while it's dormant. But once the trees wake up and put out new growth, then it's ok to fertilize. It won't be wasted that way.

Edgar said there was an exception to winter/summer pruning. He insisted cherimoyas get pruned in August, not before, not after. He added they should be pruned after the tree has finished fruiting, and recommends keeping them as low as 5 feet tall, and prune the tips of the branches so the energy goes into fruit instead of growth.

Suddenly, a third video appeared!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zL3N5kf_Muc

We watched Alex Silber of Papaya Tree Nursery talk about cherimoya tree care and pruning. He recommends pruning in spring.

In April some of the old leaves drop before new leaves begin to grow. Cherimoyas can get to 30 - 40 feet tall but you can choose a shorter cultivar, or prune them down. Commercial growers prune their trees "heavily." One season's worth of growth can be over 5 feet!

Prune off the vegetation and leave 6-8" (or shorter) branches. This keeps the tree low, and also reinvigorates: a heavily pruned cherimoya produces three times more flowers than normal!

Note the directions the buds grow. Trim to a bud which points in the direction you want it to grow (such as away

from the center). Remove side branches which "don't belong." Cherimoya wood is relatively soft and can be trimmed using a bypass pruners.

When you're done pruning and there's no foliage - and if you live in a hot arid location like the San Fernando Valley - paint the tops of the branches where they are exposed to the sun, using a water-based latex paint to prevent sunburn.

Edgar Valdivia encouraged everyone to do lots of pruning. He told us how he didn't realize his tree had mangoes because it was too crowded and he never saw them until it was trimmed way back! (Meanwhile, his neighbor over the fence was enjoying the fruit.)

David Payton confirmed that heavy pruning can be a good thing. One of the Payton's trees was hacked back to the trunk. Now it's growing lots of fresh new branches.

After the videos, we had a virtual tour of Anwar Hachache's lovely garden. We saw how vigorous his peach tree is after heavy pruning. He says he doesn't follow rules, he just hacks it back. He has to keep things small because he has a small yard. Branches longer than 3-4 feet get cut. Anwar noted his trees will only get as big as he lets them grow.

There was a LOT to learn that day!

April - Charles Malki's Garden Tour

April's meeting was attended by about 27 chapter members. We "virtually" visited the small but beautiful and quite varied garden of Charles Malki. He was a gracious host, humorous and informative. He told us ahead of time that he would challenge us with gardening questions, and we were to write our answers in the Zoom CHAT window. The person who answered the most questions correctly - and earliest, if there were any ties - would win a prize of several gardening products. (Charles is the Director of Horticulture & Education at IV Organics.)

The tour was lovely. Charles' garden has 700 square feet of dirt (along with other hardscaping), but he has managed to fill it with wonderful things. He admitted he and his wife both had to compromise on the amount of exposed dirt versus cement areas for sitting and visiting. The back yard has about 20 fruit trees, but, because they are almost all grafted, it's more like 30 - 40 fruit trees. The front yard is more ornamental, but has a few fruit trees.

Charles started by talking about the importance of native plants. He encouraged everyone to plant natives to feed the local fauna and keep them healthy and alive.

If you plant "islands" of hope, feeding and supporting the ecosystem around you, it increases pollination. Natives also attract predators and help support the growth of good plants.

On to the tour! Charles challenged us with the first two questions and then described the pattern of feeding that plants typically need: less food in winter when growth is slow, and more in summer when growth is maximum. Also, plants use more fertilizer when there are more light-hours in the day and the plant is growing the most.

Charles showed us how he supports his roses, pruning them short enough, and tying them to wide-apart stakes so they open up, and then grow vertical again. His goal is to create a second leader to grow at a 45 degree angle, and then he will release it to grow up. He described tying a branch to a stake and slowly pulling it tighter every week or two to open it up gently, then he lets the vertical growth take over. He also emphasized NOT tying the knot in the string around the plant, as it can damage the growing tissue. Instead, you should tie the knot at the stake itself.

He showed us several pygmy palms, and one very special Senegal Date palm, aka *Phoenix reclinata*. It is a multi-branching palm, which can be grown as a single stem or multi stem, and if it gets too large you can trim it down and it will still grow. He can control height and the number of fronds much easier than on a single-stem date palm.

We saw a 4-in-one olive tree. Charles started by rotting a Manzanillo olive cutting, then pruned it very short and allowed suckers to grow from the roots. These suckers were grafted with Koroneiki olive, California Mission olive, and an Italian Toscano variety. In the back yard, he has a row of many lemon trees: Meyer, Eureka, Lisbon, Ponderosa, Pink Lemonade, and so on. They are pruned heavily to maintain low height and ease of harvest, yet they delivered over 100 lbs of lemons last year!

He showed off some new grafts (protected by a wound dressing/bandage to keep moisture inside). A potted Key Lime tree and another potted Ponderosa

Lemon were propped up against the Lisbon lemon. A branch from each of the potted trees was scraped, then stuffed inside the peeled-open bark of the Lisbon. Nylon fishing twine was used to hold the bark closed as these two "side grafts" healed. Once the scions are strongly attached to the new tree, he will be cut them off their potted rootstock.



Taking a page from Tom Spellman of Dave Wilson Nursery, he planted two plum trees in one hole. Surrounding it is milkweed, which feeds the caterpillars of monarch butterflies. Surrounding this are clumps of nasturtiums, which attract pests away from other plants. Nasturtiums also attract predatory hoverflies, which eat other insects.

Another native plant he encourages growing is the California native fuchsia. It grows with noninvasive spreading roots and attracts pollinators.

He showed us a multi-grafted stone fruit tree with Royal apricot, Red Baron peach, Burgundy plum, plus two more grafts. He uses a cleft graft for this tree. Then he showed us girdling damage from rabbits, who chewed off the bark for almost two feet. He protected it in time and the bark mostly grew back.

His favorite tree on the property is a ten-in-one fig tree. It started as one tree, which he pruned low so it split in two. He then pruned the structure again until he had 10 viable branches. Then he grafted! Now it has Brown Turkey, Strawberry Verte, Green Ischia, Kadota, Panache/Tiger fig (which has variegated wood as well as fruit), Raspberry Latte, Santa Rita, Celeste, and Chicago figs.

Charles pointed out the difference between the early "breba" crop, which grows on brown (last year's) wood, and the edible crop, which grows at the tip of this year's green stems.

Then he showed us how to make more branches, which is useful for finding appropriate locations to graft! Leaf tips have auxins and root tips have cytokines. Both chemicals encourage plant growth. By simply removing the tips (and the auxins), it leaves the cytokines in the lower (lateral) branches as the primary source for growth - and you get more branches!

He also advised us not to be in a hurry to remove stakes when tweaking a plant structure. He moves his stakes frequently to make sure the branches he is adjusting are growing in the right direction. And he does not remove stakes until the branches are fixed in their growth pattern. But he also warns against leaving a branch tied to a stake so long that the tie ends up girdling and harming the plant.

Other plants he showed off included a Kentia palm, a finger lime, a Big Jim loquat, Purple Splash rose, passionfruit vines, a Spice Zee Nectaplum, an Ice Cream banana, blueberries, Dapple Supreme and Emerald Drop pluots, a Sweet Treat Pluerry, Edgar Valdivia's dragonfruit and yellow long-neck fig, a black pomegranate, a Fuerte avocado, and a Granny Smith apple (with Fuji and Golden Dorsett apples waiting to be side-grafted on the Granny Smith).

It was a fascinating tour and we all learned quite a lot. Thank you for sharing your garden and advice with us, Charles!

Malki Gardening Quiz

How much do you know about gardening? See if you can answer all of the questions from the April Tour.

- Q1: What is the most important month, in general, to fertilize your plants?
- Q2: Name at least two beneficial organisms in the soil
- Q3: What is California's State flower?
- Q4: What are the macronutrients plants need?
- Q5: How do you prevent blossom-end rot in tomatoes?
- Q6: List 3 ways you can own a Hass avocado tree without buying it?
- Q7: Why and when do you whitewash a plant?

Don't look below until you've made your guesses!

A1: May is the most important fertilizing month, if you are organically feeding your plants. This is because you want the soil biology to break down the fertilizer so it becomes readily available to the plants. May is when the soil biology is awake and active. Note: A synthetic fertilizer offers the foods immediately, but because it breaks down quickly, it needs to be re-applied more frequently.

A2: Beneficial soil organisms ("soil biology") include earthworms, bacteria, and mycorrhizal fungi. Did you know one mushroom can spread roots 100 feet away and connect your whole garden?

A3: The California poppy is the state flower.

A4: The three most important macronutrients are Nitrogen, for growth; Phosphorus, for flowers; and Potassium, for strong roots. These are commonly known, and referred to as N-P-K. But most people forget there are other macronutrients the plants need: Magnesium, which aids in photosynthesis; Sulfur, which is in amino acids and aids in protein synthesis; and Calcium, which helps with cell wall strength.

A5: Blossom-end rot indicates a Calcium deficiency and can be prevented by feeding calcium to the tomato plant.

A6: You can grow a "true" Hass avocado through grafting, air layering, and rooting a cutting. Growing from seed will give you whatever random genetics went into the fruit, and could cause your new tree to be something completely different. All of us are not identical to mom and dad. So you want to clone it.

A7: Whitewashing a plant is usually done after summer pruning. Whitewashing has been known for 1000s of years. Charles discourages the use of latex paints because they are not organic: paint and tar are intended to last years and not break down, but the plant continues to grow. Latex and tar-based products trap moisture and could contribute to internal rot.

CRFG – This Works for Me!

By Edgar Valdivia

This is a very good video on Avocado pollination. Watch it first and see what you think, I believe you will learn a lot from it. It talks about male and female flowers, type-A and type-B avocados, temperature and humidity, and hand pollination.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jdMMjZjI6g>

Editor's Column

(With Classifieds!)

OFFER: Plants. Come to our upcoming Plant Sale!! June 19 in Tarzana, address to be announced soon!

One of our chapter couples has volunteered their gated yard so we can hold a private plant sale for chapter members only. They are located south of Ventura Blvd, almost directly in line with Sepulveda Gardens. Charles Portney has graciously donated many wonderful and special trees and plants in the past and this year is no different. Pepinos, sugar cane, Babaco papaya, lavender, collard trees, cardoon, cape gooseberry, rhubarb, rose apple, epazote, fig trees – well over 100 plants await you!

As always, Charles strongly encourages other chapter members to donate their spare plants also.

If you have plants to donate but are unable to bring them to the sale, please contact me at editor@crfg-la.org or any of the chapter members whose contact information is listed in the green box on page 1 of the newsletter. We will find some way to hold them until June 19th.

Mark your calendars – it will be our first in-person (private) event. Be aware you will be requested to wear a mask and keep socially distant, even if you've had your vaccination.