



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

LOS ANGELES CHAPTER

2022 Volume XXVII Issue 3

Sepulveda Garden Center is opening for meetings again! See June's event announcement for details. We hope to see everyone there!!

Garden Tour: La Verne Nursery

Saturday, May 21, 10:00 am

Location: La Verne Nursery, Piru, CA

For Members Only, please. Daniel Nelson, the Director of Nursery Operations, will lead us on a tour of this wonderful local wholesale nursery. La Verne Nursery supplies trees and plants to many local nurseries. There is a possibility we may be able to pre-order trees prior to the event date, and pick them up after the tour has concluded. More information will be provided closer to the event itself.

In-Person Event: CRFG Annual Plant Sale

Saturday, June 25, 10:00 am

Location: SEPULVEDA GARDEN CENTER! Yes!

The Sepulveda Garden Center has finally started allowing in-person events at its main meeting room, and we plan to fill it with plants! Come one, come all (if you are a CRFG-LA member) and bring your plants with you. Our biggest fundraiser of the year. Charles Portney will be donating many of his fabulous and rare plants, and provide his usual, encyclopedic knowledge by describing everything for sale that day, including donations from other members.

If your last name begins with A-M, please bring food to share for our potluck table.

Coming soon: Water use reduction - a forum on how to save water at home and in your gardens.

Date and meeting method TBA

This special event is currently being planned and will probably take place between regularly scheduled CRFG-LA events. As you know, The Los Angeles Metropolitan Water District recently announced mandatory water cutbacks. With this in mind, we have been looking for ways to help our save our gardens but still use water wisely. We are negotiating to have a panel of experts to provide advice, and open discussions to inspire reduced water usage at home and in your gardens. Details to be provided as soon as they come available.

Save the date!

CALENDAR FOR LA CHAPTER 2022

July 23	Garden Tour: Conejo Valley Botanic Gardens
August	No meeting (CRFG Festival of Fruit?)
September 24	To be announced
October 22	To be announced
November 19	To be announced
December 10	Holiday Party

*The Festival of Fruit may be postponed until 2023, in which case our chapter may schedule an August meeting or event.

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LOOKING BACK

By Deborah Oisboid, Editor

March 26 - Sylmar High Tour/First Annual Tony Stewart Memorial Tree Symposium

This was a real, honest-to-goodness, in-person CRFG-LA event! Our March field trip was at an old favorite location: Sylmar High School Horticulture Department, headed by Steve List.



The event began with a few comments from Steve List, who dedicated this annual outing to Tony Stewart, our former CRFG-LA Chairman who generously volunteered at Steve's projects for many years. Next year Steve hopes to have a guest lecturer like we've had in the past, and also hopes to include a tree auction as well.

He talked about how he and his students learn things- by researching and by trial and error - and by unintentionally killing things! He says you learn more by mistakes than by success. If their trial kills something, "now we know what NOT to do." Sometimes a failure says it's not something to try again. For example, they tried all sorts of berries for several years: grapes, blackberries, blueberries, raspberries. Grapes did ok, but the blackberries and raspberries just wouldn't grow, not enough water, etc. So they won't try growing those again.

Right now, Steve and his students are focusing on vegetables, pollinators, and herbs. The plants which the Ag department grows are often donated or given away. They don't sell anything; all of the plants are given away to schools, community gardens, and low-income families. When Steve and his students discovered that most of their landscape plants were just sitting around, not taken, they reduced the number they were growing. (An education in marketing as well as propagation.)

Before he showed us around, we had an incredible potluck lunch. You know you're at a CRFG-LA event when you have such incredible, exotic dishes such as homegrown AND

homemade Key Lime Pie tartlets, Macadamia-Wasabi mochi squares, fabulous garlic pasta (with or without marinara sauce), awesome fresh croissantwiches, spicy vegan chili, and "Floating Clouds" dessert (a combination of Crème anglaise (custard), fruit, whipped cream, and graham cracker crumbles). There were so many exceptional dishes which we enjoyed and appreciated, in addition to the "usual" amazing assortment of fresh garden fruits and other delicacies to share.

Steve is a very busy guy. Our lunch/tour was actually his second event that same day - in the morning he had presented a different lecture on Spring Vegetables for his monthly LA City Sanitation Workshop. His workshops had been on hiatus for over a year, but are starting up again and he couldn't be happier about it.

<https://www.lacitysan.org/san/faces/home/portal/s-lsh-es/s-lsh-es-fcw>

After lunch, our tour began in earnest. Steve says what he has developed over the years is called "The Sylmar Agricultural Learning Center." Every area is a place where students can learn something different. They research, study, plant, and see what works. There are no written tests, everything is hands on learning.

Our tour started in the Pollinator and Sage Gardens, right inside the school gate. The beds were full of lavender, African Blue Basil, lantana, milkweed, and many more plants, both California natives and non-natives. The flowers were full of Monarchs and other butterflies, as well as bees.

There is a brightly colored mural on the schoolroom wall, designed by one student and painted by other students, and dedicated to some very special students and friends who passed along the way (including Tony Stewart). The mural's images all symbolize gardens and growing in some way.



We saw the Lath House, which had hundreds of Gerbera daisy starts. (In Winter, the House is full of cyclamens.) Then we went to the recently refurbished Hot House, with its thousands of plant starts inside. We were introduced to the Finishing Area, where repotted 6-packs of starter plants were beautifully labeled and lined up. Steve's student had planted over 3000 strawberries from rooted cuttings.

The middle ground had their huge 4x4x4 barrels prepared for tomato plants (one plant per barrel). They use what Steve calls his "lasagna" method of planting, with a layer of compost, a layer of organic fertilizer, a layer of potting soil, a layer of fertilizer, a layer of compost, a layer of fertilizer, and so on. The tomatoes apparently grow at least 5 feet tall and half as wide. Dry fertilizer takes longer to break down, so by the time the roots reach each layer, it's nearly at full strength.

They are also growing grape "trees" and hops vines. No, they are not turning the hops into beer. However, they do learn about that possibility because, after all, it is a fairly common part of American agriculture!



When Steve suddenly needed to leave to take care of something school related, his protégé Stephan took over the tour. He got some help from our own Edgar Valdivia, who filled in some blanks about dragonfruit, and several other fruit species.

Stephan introduced us to a very useful Chill Calculator phone app, which shows how many (combined, to date) chill hours a location has received this year:

<https://fruitsandnuts.ucdavis.edu/chill-calculator>

(Scroll down to the map and select the point closest to your area. It is not comprehensive and there are large gaps between recording stations, but it can give you a good idea how much frost your area has experienced.)

We saw chickens off to the side in well caged areas. The fruit tree orchard is opposite the livestock. And in the very back is a huge, open structure for finished plants such as grapes, sapling trees, dragonfruit, and other wonderful things in 5-gallon pots (or larger).

Steve rejoined us on the other side of the yard, where extremely mature apple, persimmon, and mulberry trees grew. We saw the Winter Garden (just finishing and getting ready for Spring vegetables) and the Citrus Grove. The center's three gigantic compost bins were quite impressive, and provide nutrition to everything they grow.

It's always impressive how much goes on at Sylmar High. We thank Steve List - and Stephan! - very much for their hospitality and fascinating stories.

April 23 - Tour of Aura Carmi's garden

From her wide-open backyard, Aura Carmi can view the foothills of Simi Valley, Mount Baldy, Mount Wilson, and the Santa Monica Mountains. And from an adjacent hilltop she can see the

ocean and the Channel Islands! But we weren't there for the far-distant views that day in April. We wanted to see the remarkable variety of rare plants she is growing.



When she moved to the location more than 20 years ago, the property was mostly avocados: Bacon on the periphery, and Hass towards the middle. She started planting all sorts of other trees: citrus, stone fruit, pears, and apples. But she lost a lot of her trees during the severe drought years of 2013-2016. First her plums died, then her nectarines, and peaches, until she had almost none left. Time to rethink gardening!

Her property extends nearly 3 acres. The upper house area is mostly level, except along the edges. Her "backyard" and "Meadow" areas are quite large and mostly level, and then the property drops down about 50 - 100 feet to the lower flat region, which she has dubbed "The Flatland." This gives her multiple distinctly different (micro) climates, with the upper plateau never freezing but exposed to extremely strong winds, and the lower area receiving about 200- 300 chill hours, plus extra water runoff from the uphill neighbors. Her stone fruit were moved downhill, among some of the remaining avocados as well as a few stone pines and other cooler-loving trees.

Aura firmly believes that climate change is real. When her family first moved to this house, they would have winds but only at certain times of the year, and only for a day or two. Now the wind is almost year-round and it can blow for a week at a time, with gusts up to 50- 75 miles per hour.

How do you garden under these conditions?

Windbreaks! She has taller trees at the edges of her property and keeps the inner trees lower for protection. Sapote, liquidambar, and acacia all act as a windblock for the upper orchard.

Everything is on drip irrigation, and the fruit trees get a daylong soak every two weeks. She has the tubes at the very edge of the tree canopies to ensure the roots spread nicely and have plenty of gripping and growing room.

She also has a major gopher problem. She loses a lot of rosemary to gophers but she simply re-roots cuttings and sticks them back in. Fruit trees get caged, which is a huge, laborious process. She digs a hole 4x the size of the root ball (minimum 3 feet deep) and lines it with double layers of chickenwire on the bottom and sides. She knows the galvanized wire will eventually rot after 5 - 6 years, but, hopefully by then, the tree will have become well established and can survive a gopher attack.

We started in the backyard orchard, where we saw a pair of cherimoyas (parent and child, with different flavored



fruits!), Smyrna quince, Cocktail grapefruit (cross between pomelo and mandarin), grafted apricots, several citrus varieties, two Asian pears, a white pomegranate, Granada pomegranate, and a Lolita Eugenia (which she thinks tastes like gasoline - "the worst fruit on the

planet!") The gate area is covered with blackberry brambles, originally thornless but which grew thornier over the years, possibly having cross pollinated with the local, delicious wild blackberries.

Her driveway and front yard have beautiful drought-tolerant plants, mostly California natives. She is also growing blueberries in pots along the house wall (for protection), and camellias wherever she can tuck them in. They get extra sulfur because her soil is quite alkaline.

In the front orchard, she has a huge Hass avocado, a Satsuma mandarin, Meyer lemon, lemon guava, Fuyu persimmon, a seedling feijoa with delicious fruit, Babcock peach, Big Jim loquat, two tiny 15-year-old pawpaw trees which have not-so-tasty fruit, a Kaffir lime, a very prolific sapote, Oro Blanco grapefruit, low-chill yellow nectarine, Fuji apple ("dependable as the day is long!"), jujube (she has to aggressively trim back the rootstock, and it still came up in her neighbor's yard!), Dorsett apple (never has good fruit unless you catch it on exactly the right day - otherwise it's mushy), mango, and her amazing, fantastic, rare apricot.

The apricot is a very special tree. She says it is delicious when green as well as when it's orange and ripe. Also, the fruit will dry on the tree and still taste delicious. She has

not been able to identify it, although she has tried many times and asked many experts. Fruit expert Marta Matvienko thinks it might be an antique Blenheim variety. The tree was at Aura's house since she bought it and she's very concerned that this special tree may be reaching the end of its life.

Multiple people, including our own Jim Watts from years ago, have tried to graft it onto a rootstock, but they either failed, or never did very well. Marta suggested the apricot does not like Citation rootstock (most stone fruit rootstocks are plums) and suggested they would do better if grafted onto other apricot trees. Aura now has at least three trees covered with the rare grafts and is keeping her fingers crossed that next year they will still be thriving.

Between front and back yards is "The Corral," where she is growing lucuma, Pakistan mulberries, liquidambar, and bay laurel.

She told the story of how one of her dogs managed to leap over the fence and somehow land in the cherimoya tree on the other side, preventing her from tumbling down to the lower Flatland and possibly saving her life. That cherimoya doesn't make good fruit, but is not going to be taken out, for sentimental reasons.

The plants in the Corral get the worst of the windblasts. One of her success stories is her lucuma tree, which is on a partially exposed slope and feels the brunt of the windblasts.

According to the CRFG website, you aren't supposed to fertilize lucuma, and it lives in the Andes where there are lots of winds, so lucuma loves sun, loves wind, loves dry conditions. Her tree was loaded with fruit for us to admire.

The backyard has paved patio areas, a rose garden, several more fruit trees, and "The Meadow," which gets absolutely



no additional water, just rainfall, and she keeps it full of California poppies and other wildflowers.

On the other side of the 8-foot tall fence is the steep slope with a switchback path. We admired it from a distance (the top of the hill) and learned she is filling it with California native trees and scrub. Planting them on a slope is a challenge because you don't want to bury the crowns, so they have to be planted at the top of the slope in every hole, so the crown can breathe. Toyon, manzanita, olives, and live oak are just starting out.

Down at the bottom, in her "Flatland" area, are the trees which do better with a little chill: stone fruit, some apples, a few remaining avocados, and some Stone Pines.

Aura actually gets to eat her fruit! She says squirrels have about a 30 second life expectancy in her yard because of her Samoyed dogs, who love to chase and catch the furry bandits. These three delightful white doggies kept us company throughout the tour.

She fertilizes with fish emulsion and "crumbles." Not everything gets fertilized (roses = monthly from March - July), but when they do, it's always with liquid fish and kelp emulsion. Crumbles are used about once per year, and get placed around the roots of her citrus and stone fruits. She also puts down a lot of mulch. She gets mulch "for free" from neighboring arborists, but she says it's not really free because of the high cost of the hired labor needed to spread it across her nearly 3 acres.

After our fascinating tour, we enjoyed a delightful repast of fresh-picked fruit from members' gardens: Surinam cherries, Minnie Royal and Royal Lee cherries, blueberries, mango, tangerines and mandarines, loquats, and even some jackfruit (not from a garden). There was also delicious quinoa and some chicken, as well as plenty of cookies and muffins with jam to round out the meal.

We thank Aura very much for her wonderful hospitality and wish her all the best luck with her special apricot grafts!



PHOTOS! PHOTOS! PHOTOS!

Don't forget to check out our online collection of photos, from in-person tours and other events. They're viewable at <http://www.crfg-la.org/piwigo>

Loquat Jam

By Deborah Oisboid

I brought some homemade loquat jam to the April tour and was asked to please include the recipe for others who may want to try it. It's very simple, although time consuming because it takes FOREVER to boil the moisture out.

INGREDIENTS:

- 8 – 10 cups fresh loquats
- 4 – 6 whole, underripe apples (about 1 – 2 inches in diameter)
- Juice of 2 lemons
- 4 heaping cups sugar

DIRECTIONS:

Dip 1 – 2 dozen loquats into a pot of boiling water for 30 to 50 seconds, then move them to a bowl of cool water.

Peel and de-seed the loquats. Repeat until all loquats have been peeled and de-seeded. (Peels come off easier after flash boiling.)

Place loquats and unpeeled, uncut apples (with the seeds) into a large pot and simmer until apples are thoroughly soft and have changed color (about an hour). Stir occasionally to prevent burning. Allow the mix to cool for an hour, or put in the refrigerator overnight.

Remove apple seeds but leave apple peels in the mix. Run the boiled fruit through a food mill (or puree using a food processor). Add lemon and sugar. Citric acid may be added to brighten the color.) Re-simmer until volume has been reduced by at least half. (It took me over 2 hours and the mash was in in two separate pots to allow more surface area of jam to be heated at the same time.) Stir frequently to help the moisture to evaporate.

When the fruit is thickened, pour into sterilized jars and allow to cool before putting into the refrigerator. Makes about 5 cups of jam.

