

# YEAR OF THE PITAHAYA

## LOS ANGELES CHAPTER

January 2010 Volume XIV Issue 1

HAPPY NEW  
YEAR!

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

### 2009 Chapter Officers & Committees

Chairman:  
Bill Brandt  
805 492-3864 chairman@crfg-la.org

Treasurer:  
K. Payton  
818 222-7556 treasurer@crfg-la.org

Newsletter Editor:  
Pat Valdivia  
805-584-6244 editor@crfg-la.org

Program Chairman:  
Lynn Maxson  
805 527-3912 program@crfg-la.org

Publicity:  
Shelley Smith  
818 363-5247 publicity@crfg-la.org

Historian:  
Emory Walton  
805 497-8835 historian@crfg-la.org

Special Events:  
Richard Watts  
805 484-3584 events@crfg-la.org

Hospitality Chairman:  
Anita Drapkin  
818 888-8630  
membership@crfg-la.org

Food Coordinator:  
Chris Warren  
818 362-8537 food@crfg-la.org

Plant Sales:  
David Payton  
818 222-7556 plants@crfg-la.org

Secretary/Hostess:  
Edith Watts  
805 484-3584 hospitality@crfg-la.org

Development Fund:  
Bob Vieth  
805 495-9789

### January Meeting

**\*\*Date: Saturday, JANUARY 30, 2010 PLEASE NOTE DATE**

**Time: 10:00 A.M.**

**Place: Sepulveda Garden Center  
16633 Magnolia Blvd., Encino, CA 91316**

**Program: GRAFTING AND SCION EXCHANGE  
HELP OUR CHAPTER - BRING SCIONS (seeds, cuttings, etc.)**

We need your participation to bring back the glory days of the LA Chapter Scion Exchange!!! Everything helps!

As long as your trees are healthy, just bring moist, bagged, and labeled scions (both ends can be straight cut as long as the upside is obvious) as well as fresh large cuttings. We will let the people who select the scions and cuttings for personal use be responsible for sterilizing them. We're tired of seeing only the same familiar names on the same varieties. Those folks and those varieties are welcome and will be there too, but please bring more of YOURS. Also, keep in mind that many independent new plants grow from seeds and cuttings, so seeds and cuttings are welcome as well. Thank you so much. **It's your ongoing spirit and enthusiasm that makes ours such a dynamic and thriving chapter!** (See next page for more details)

### February Meeting

**Date: Saturday, February 27, 2010**

**Time: 10 AM**

**Place: Jesus Alvarez' garden: 1217 Mott St., San Fernando, CA 91340**

**Program: Jesus' garden** of more than one hundred trees, consists of avocado trees, citrus and many different stone fruits. Jesus, is doing all of this in a 40 by 40 ft size backyard. Sounds like a true and enthusiastic fruit lover, doesn't he?

**\*\*It would be best if you could car pool, as parking is limited (unless you are willing to walk about a block)**

**Directions:** Take the 405 Fwy north and exit at San Fernando Mission Blvd toward San Fernando. Turn right on San Fernando Mission Blvd. Turn left on Mott St. Arrive at **1217 Mott St.** House will be on the right.

**ATTENTION ALL MEMBERS!! If your last name begins with A-L please bring something for our January tasting table. Although, many fruits are out of season now, please bring whatever you have ripening in your gardens, to share and show off.**

FESTIVAL

OF

FRUIT

WEBSITE:

[HTTP://WWW.FESTIVALOFFRUIT.ORG](http://www.festivaloffruit.org)

## SCION WOOD PREPARATION

- “ Wood should come from clean, disease-free and non-patented trees.
- “ Select straight wood from last year’s growth and cut as near to our scion wood exchange date as possible.
- “ Wood should be 1/4” – 3/8” diameter (pencil size) and contain several buds.
- “ Cut to lengths that fit easily into a ziplock-type bag  
Bundle by variety in a moist paper towel(s) and place in a ziplock-type bag, leaving a slight opening in the ziplock bag for the wood to breathe. Make sure that the towel(s) stay damp as long as the wood is stored.
- “ Label outside of bag with fruit type and variety, as well as any additional information you feel is pertinent (i.e. minimum chilling hours; needs pollinator; vigor; zip code where successfully grown, etc).
- “ Keep scion wood bag in vegetable bin of your refrigerator until the morning of the exchange. Be careful not to let the scion wood freeze!
- “ At the exchange, please wait to make your selections until directed by the chairman.
- “ Please limit your selections to two of any variety, until all the groups have had their opportunity. Then feel free to go back



## Finger lime: the caviar of citrus

By David Karp

*Los Angeles Times*, December 18, 2009

This year, for the first time, you don't have to be a scientist or an Australian to taste citrus caviar from legendary finger limes, as the initial, very small harvest from commercial plantings in California has started to show up at local markets and restaurants.

The finger lime is very different from other citrus, somewhat resembling a gherkin, elongated in shape, and up to 3 inches in length. Its skin is thin and can range

from purplish or greenish black, the most typical color, to light green or rusty red. When the fruit is cut in half, the juice vesicles, which are under pressure, ooze out as if erupting from a mini-volcano. Unlike the tender, teardrop-shaped juice sacs in standard citrus, the translucent, greenish-white or pinkish vesicles in finger limes are round and firm, and pop on the tongue like caviar, releasing a flavor that combines lemon and lime with green and herbaceous notes. The rind oil is also quite aromatic, and contains isomenthone, which is common in mint but rare in citrus.

What do you do with these digit-shaped prodigies? Like other acid citrus, they're really too tart to eat fresh, but even so, the first time you encounter one, try cutting it in half and sucking out the caviar, squeezing it out of the rind like toothpaste from the tube, just to experience the fruit to the fullest. Next try some on a slice of Fuyu persimmon, to balance that fruit's unidimensional sweetness with a pleasing smack of sourness. A little goes nicely with fish, but not too much, because the assertive flavor can easily overpower delicate seafood.

And mixologists are already developing trendy finger lime cocktails -- Australian margaritas, anyone?

Craft restaurant in Century City applies vinaigrette containing what it calls "lime caviar" to both hamachi sashimi and Kumamoto oysters. "When the juice vesicles pop in your mouth, there's an explosion of flavor," says chef Anthony Zappola. "Customers are surprised, they think it's some kind of molecular gastronomy, and they're shocked to find that it's from a natural piece of fruit."

The fruits are not cheap, at almost \$2 apiece, but a little goes a long way, he added.

Chefs, or more particularly the buyers who supply them, are vying furiously to obtain a supply. Kerry Clasby, the forager who provides finger limes to Craft, says she was sworn by the farmers who sell to her not to divulge their identities, lest they be besieged by finger lime fanatics. "Hopefully in a year or two the supply will increase and it's not going to be an issue," she says.

The finger lime is *Microcitrus australasica*, one of six species of citrus native to Australia, in this case to the eastern coastal rain forests. It differs significantly from conventional citrus in several ways, including having very small leaves and flowers, which in 1915 prompted the great citrus scientist Walter T. Swingle to assign the finger lime and its kin to a separate genus, *Microcitrus*. In 1998 the botanist and taxonomist David J. Mabberley proposed reclassifying *Microcitrus* as *Citrus*, but genetic analyses are inconclusive, and scientists have not

universally accepted this move. A few decades ago scientists surmised that a *Microcitrus* species might be one of the parents of regular limes, but current evidence does not support this.

In the last two decades, as part of a wider interest in native "bush tucker," Australian growers have cultivated finger limes on a modest scale, and fruit breeders have made selections and crosses to come up with improved varieties, in a rainbow of colors -- green, red, pink and yellow. Fresh finger limes cannot be imported legally to the United States, however.

The Department of Agriculture imported finger lime seeds or cuttings more than a century ago, and Swingle worked on the trees in a greenhouse in Washington D.C., but it seems that the species never became established in this country. The finger lime variety being grown today in California is derived from material imported from Australia, via Arizona, in the 1960s, when scientists planted it at the UC Riverside Citrus Variety Collection. For several decades scientists mainly used the trees for rootstock trials and hybridization, but they and visitors also got a kick out of the fruits, and five years ago the university released budwood of the variety for California nurseries to use in propagating trees. (Disclosure: I occasionally assist the collection as a volunteer researcher and photographer.)

From the introduction of a variety to the appearance of fruit at markets is a lengthy process, as nurseries figure out how to grow the trees, farmers buy and plant them, and the trees slowly mature and bear fruit. Currently one or two dozen farms around the state grow finger limes, on a total of about 10 to 15 acres. One of the oldest and largest groves is at Venice Hill Ranch, in Visalia, where three years ago the owner, James Shanley, planted 600 trees, which are just starting to bear in semi-commercial quantities this year. Peak season is November and December, but the trees produce some fruit year-round in coastal districts.

Growers have quickly discovered how difficult it is to cultivate this crop. The young trees of other citrus species typically produce extra-large fruits, but most juvenile finger limes are tiny, often no longer than an inch. When the fruits do reach a decent size, they tend to fall on the ground at the slightest breeze. The fruits mostly grow inside dense, bushy foliage, which bristles with nasty thorns.

"We're really striking out in new territory with this baby," says Lance Walheim of California Citrus Specialties, a grower and packer that will market the harvest from Venice Hill Ranch next week. "We're still trying to figure out how to grow it."

Barbara Foskett, a partner of CCS, says the fruits will probably be packed in small plastic clamshells, such as are used for berries, but that she has not yet set a price. Some of the harvest will go to Davalan Sales, a produce distributor in Los Angeles, and Robert Morse, a salesman for this firm, says that if there are enough finger limes to sell to retailers, they will probably go to high-end markets like Pavilions, Bristol Farms, Gelsons or Whole Foods.

Melissa's World Variety Produce will also be receiving a consignment, and based on availability, may sell some directly to the public by mail order.

Just a few farmers market growers have planted finger limes, including Mud Creek Ranch of Santa Paula, which will sell a few fruits from its 12 trees at the Hollywood market this Sunday. Churchill Orchard of Ojai, which has 15 trees, will sell any remaining fruits when they start coming to the Ojai farmers market around Jan. 10.

Finger lime trees are available from several sources, including Maddock Nursery in Fallbrook ([760] 728-7172) and Four Winds Nursery in Winters.

## Finger Lime Vinaigrette

2 tablespoons macadamia oil  
2 tablespoons white wine vinegar  
1/4 teaspoon ground native pepper  
"caviar" of 1 large finger lime  
tiny pinch of sea salt  
Put all in a small jar and shake madly.

## Year of the Pitahaya/Dragon Fruit

Emory Walton has busily been working to prepare a wonderful website for our upcoming Festival. Please check it out at <http://www.festivaloffruit.org> The registration form is posted so you can sign up early. Many of the speakers are already listed along with the topics they will cover.

Dear Lynn, we are all wishing you a speedy recovery and hope to see you soon. We miss you!

## Resolutions for the Gardener



Some gardening resolutions you may want to consider in order to bring about a happy New Year garden in 2010.

I promise to remember to trim my garden.

I promise to remember to prune my garden. .

I promise to talk words of life into my garden, and not the other words I sure hope my kids and neighbors didn't hear.

I promise to pull the weeds out of my garden and not justify them as some exotic flora.

I promise to water my garden consistently, and not every 30 days.

I promise to find out the names of the fruits in my garden instead of saying "My, isn't that a lovely red shaped thingy." (for the non-gardening member of the family)

I promise to not use the 30 year old unsharpened pruning scissors in my efforts to trim down the front yard tree.

I promise that in times of excess, I will give to those that are in need. I will share with my friends and family.

If I have a little extra I will give it to the local soup kitchen or Food Share

And the most important resolution

**I promise to enjoy every minute of working with the Earth. I will savor my products, and relish the compliments that my jealous guests will shower upon me!**

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## YOURS FOR THE TAKING

**Don Weber** has a compost tumbler that he is giving away. Anyone interested has only to come and pick it up. Call **Don** if you are interested at 818 894-3085.

**CELEBRATING THE HOLIDAYS** Not only did we have the opportunity to eat delicious food, mingle with old friends, win wonderful prizes, but also this year we had the pleasure of hearing two holiday songs-one for Christmas and one for Hanukkah, sung by our dear member **Marcia Melcombe**. What a treat it was for all of us, and what a lovely voice Marcia has. She really put us all in a joyous mood.

Thanks to all of you for bringing in such wonderful dishes! Also, thank you to those who brought in gifts or plants for our raffle.



**David & Marcia Melcombe with a beautiful fruit carving.**

Several of our members were also presented with an award for their very special contributions to our Chapter. They were **Herb & Anita Drapkin, Edith & Dick Watts, Edgar & Pat Valdivia, Kathy & Bob Vieth, Ed Hager and Christine Warren**.

It was a wonderful way to end the year! And we all look forward to an even better year in 2010!

