



LOS ANGELES CHAPTER

2025 Volume XXX Issue 1

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

2024 Chapter Officers & Committees

Chairman: chairman@CRFG-la.org
Anwar Hachache

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

Secretary: hospitality@CRFG-la.org
Margaret Frane 310-429-9455

Newsletter Editor: editor@CRFG-la.org
Deborah Oisboid

Program Chair: program@CRFG-la.org
Lydia Shabestari 818-572-3460

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

Food Coordinator:
Chris Warren 818-362-8537

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

Members at Large:
Eve Guth guth_atlarge@CRFG-la.org
Kathleen Doran doran_atlarge@CRFG-la.org
Kevin Lieu kevin_atlarge@CRFG-la.org
Art Fitzsimmons art_atlarge@CRFG-la.org
Reza Shabestari reza_atlarge@CRFG-la.org

Emeritus Members:
Pat Valdivia edpitaya@gmail.com
Edgar Valdivia

Meeting

Topic: CRFG-LA Chapter Scion Exchange
Date: Saturday, January 25, split start time
10 am members, 11 am non-members

Location: Sepulveda Garden Center
16633 Magnolia, Encino CA 91406

It's grafting season! Bring your plant materials (scions, seeds, rhizomes, etc.) to share at our annual Scion Exchange.

- **NO CITRUS** PLEASE! Also no curry leaf plants. Help prevent the spread of Citrus Greening Disease.
- Please do not bring scions from patented trees. (See page 2)
- PLEASE LABEL YOUR SCIONS CLEARLY with the variety.
- Do not bring food.

We're going to shake things up a little this year and invite guests to join us. If you know someone who would like to attend the event, please let them know there is a \$10 donation for each non-chapter member guest.

Another new thing: **there will NOT be a potluck** at the event. We can't be sure to have enough food for everyone this time. I repeat: **do NOT bring any food** to share at this event.

Meeting

Topic: Hands-on Grafting Workshop & Lecture
Date: Saturday, February 22, 10 am
Location: Sepulveda Garden Center
16633 Magnolia, Encino CA 91406

Come to our February meeting for the first annual hands-on workshop and lecture about how to graft successfully. Our member, Bill Brandt, will provide an informative talk about various ways to graft scions. We'll then break into groups so our additional guest instructors can guide you through each step to graft onto your rootstock. If you own grafting tools, you are encouraged to bring them to the workshop. A limited number of rootstocks will be available for purchase at \$5 for members and \$10 for non-members to cover the cost of materials.

Save the date!

CALENDAR FOR L.A. CHAPTER 2025

| | |
|----------------|--|
| January 25 | Open Annual Scion Exchange |
| February 22 | Hands-On Grafting Workshop & Lecture |
| March 22 | Sylmar High School Tour / Propagation Demo / Fourth Annual Tony Stewart Memorial Tree Raffle |
| April 26 | TBD |
| May 17 | All You Need To Know about Growing Dragonfruit (Panel of experts) |
| June 28 | Humongous Annual Plant Sale |
| July 26 | Organic Fruit Tree Growing & Soil Enrichment by Richard Richie |
| August 23 | TBD |
| September 27 | Biocontrol & Beneficial Insects by Ron Whitehurst |
| October 25 | Patio Tree & Small Space Gardening for the Kitchen (heirloompotager.com) |
| November 22 | TBD |
| December (TBD) | Holiday Party at Sepulveda Gardens |

CRFG Inc. will NOT be holding a 2025 Festival of Fruit in Arizona this February. No further plans have been determined or announced for 2025.

WANTED: SCIONS!

- Scions are small cuttings which can be grafted onto another tree or rooted to become its own plant.
- Trees which are coming out of dormancy are perfect for grafting and we welcome ALMOST all fruit types. **Except citrus and curry plants!!!!** There is a nasty infectious disease called HLB, or Citrus Greening Disease which can devastate citrus trees. **Please DO NOT bring** citrus scions or live curry plant materials!! Thanks for understanding.
- Scions should be 1/4" – 3/8" diameter (pencil size) and contain several growth buds (2 -3 minimum).
- The buds should be closed. If the buds are starting to open already, their energy will go into the leaves and flowers instead of making a stronger connection to the main tree.
- Scions can be prepared and stored up to several weeks ahead of time, but please try to harvest as close to the event as possible. Freshly cut wood is better for successful grafting.
- INSPECT your scions to ensure they are not carrying any pests such as aphids or scale. Scions should come from healthy trees, not ones with peach borer or other diseases. (<https://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/menu.homegarden.html>)
- Wrap cuttings in a damp (not soggy) paper towel(s) and place in a ziplock-type bag, leaving a slight opening in the bag so the wood can breathe.
- If necessary, store the scion bag in the vegetable bin of your refrigerator until the morning of the exchange. Be careful not to let the scion wood freeze!
- LABEL each bag with detailed fruit variety, as well as any additional information you feel is pertinent (i.e. "Granny Smith" apple, minimum chilling hours; pollinator needs; vigor; where successfully grown, etc.)
- When labeling figs, please specify if they are OPEN or CLOSED eye varieties. (Open eye varieties are susceptible to the insidious Black Fig Fly.)
- Bundle and label by variety.
- You can include your name on the scion bags, in case people have questions.
- At the event, **please wait to make your selections until directed**. We will announce when each group can enter the building.

- **Bring scion collection materials** such as: masking tape, pen, collection bag. As you collect scions, label them and keep them with you in your bag. If you temporarily place your bagged scions on the table, someone might assume they are still available for taking.
- **Please limit your selections to one or two of any variety**, until after EVERYONE is inside and has had a chance to select. It's not fair to make people wait in line if there's nothing left.
- Be polite and patient. CRFG-LA reserves the right to refuse entry or eject people who create disturbances.

Patently Wrong

Please do not bring patented fruit varieties to the January Scion Exchange. A plant patent protects newly invented strains of asexually reproduced plants (not from seeds). To be patentable, the plant must have been asexually propagated, such as by rooted cuttings, air layered cuttings, budding, grafting, or inarching. You cannot propagate patented plants without the inventor's permission. Violating plant patents is against the law and is a form of theft.

Plant patents typically expire 20 years from the application date. Since it is difficult to confirm whether a variety is patented or not, the Orange County CRFG chapter created a patented varieties list, including the patent expiration date when known. (Plants with expired patents may be shared.) The OC chapter has graciously shared the link with us and encouraged us to share it with other chapters as well. The list is not complete, as data is always being added/corrected, but is a good place to start:

<https://southoccrfg.org/patented-plant-list>

Alternately, please check the online Cultivar Registry of the American Pomological Society:

https://americanpomological.org/?page_id=4297

Or the Foundation Plant Service by UC Davis:

<https://fps.ucdavis.edu/treelisting.cfm>

One last option is to search your scion name at Fruit And Nut Cultivars Database:

<https://www.fruitandnutlist.org/>

For more information about plant patents and propagation, try this link:

<https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/garden-how-to/propagation/propgen/plant-patents-and-propagation.htm>

Membership Information

The California Rare Fruit Growers, Inc. (CRFG) is a non-profit organization of rare and exotic fruit enthusiasts, hobbyists and amateur horticulturists based in California. There are over 23 active chapters now, and not only in California! (<https://crfg.org>)

Our group is the “Los Angeles Chapter,” and when we are not out on a field trip or other event, we usually meet at Sepulveda Garden Center in Encino on the fourth Saturday of the month.

To become a CRFG member, you need to join the parent association (CRFG, inc). To be an active and involved member, you need to join one (or more!) local chapter(s) as well. Membership with the parent organization starts at \$29 per year, depending on your membership and choice of format for receiving our bimonthly *Fruit Gardener* magazine.

(<https://crfg.org/homepage/join-renew>)

There are many chapters in and around Los Angeles:

- Los Angeles (<https://crfg-la.org>)
- West Los Angeles (<https://wla.crfg.org>)
- Foothill (<https://foothill.crfg.org>)
- South Bay/Long Beach (<https://www.crfgsobay.org>)
- Orange County (<https://www.ocfruit.com>)
- South Orange County (<https://southoccrfg.org>)
- and Inland Empire (<https://crfg.org/homepage/chapters/california/inland-empire>)

Each chapter sets their own membership fee. CRFG-LA charges \$10 per year.

https://www.crfg-la.org/join_us.html

There is no limit to the number of chapters you can join after joining CRFG Inc; many of our CRFG-LA members also belong to one or two other chapters as well.

Exchange Rules

For a pleasant, organized experience, please follow all the rules at our CRFG-LA Chapter Scion Exchange.

Schedule:

| | |
|------------------|--|
| 9:30 – 10:00 am | Scion drop-off. Please bring all donations to the clearly marked drop-off table. Fully paid CRFG-LA 2025 members/scion donors will have first access to the event. |
| 10:00 – 10:30 am | Fully paid CRFG-LA 2025 member / scion donor admission |
| 10:30 – 11:00 am | Fully paid CRFG-LA 2025 member / non scion donor admission |
| 11:00 am + | People who paid the \$10 attendance fee admission |

Please note, membership will NOT be resolved at the event. Your CRFG-LA Chapter 2025 membership must be fully paid before the event date.

While at the event, please keep these rules in mind:

1. CITRUS AND CURRY SCIONS ARE NOT ALLOWED! Do not bring any citrus or citrus relatives or plants which can harbor HLB (Greening Disease), such as curryleaf plants. If any citrus or curry scions are brought, they will be confiscated, double-bagged, and destroyed.
2. Drop off your non-patented scions at the designated table and receive a hand-stamp to indicate donor status.
3. If you are a fully paid CRFG Inc AND CRFG-LA 2025 member, please check in at Table 1 and receive your hand-stamp to indicate such.
4. If you are not a fully-paid member or if you are a guest attendee, please check in at Table 2 to pay the \$10 attendance fee and receive your hand-stamp to indicate payment. The fee can be applied to future membership.
5. PLEASE WAIT for your group to be called at the appropriate time. Your hand-stamp(s) will indicate which group you are in.
6. Once inside, you will see tables labeled with the various categories of scions. Please only take one or two of any named/tagged variety until after 11:30am. This will allow everyone an opportunity to choose from a good selection. We will announce when you are free to take additional scions.
7. You do not have to leave the building but may continue to explore the tables until free selection has been announced.
8. Please bring your own scion-collection labels, pen, bag, etc . Most scions have a single tag with the variety name and you will want to record and/or label your scions as you collect them.
9. Please do not take anyone else’s selected scions. Some people may (accidentally) leave their bagged collection on the table, or temporarily put them down as they label their selections. ASK if you are not sure.
10. Restrooms are in the patio behind the building. Your hand-stamp will allow you re-entry if you leave.
11. There will be no food or drink at the event. Sorry you will miss our normal amazing potluck! Please join us at our other events to taste what we are growing.

LOOKING BACK

By Deborah Oisboid

November 23 – Steve Murray, Fruit Hunter, of Murray Family Farms

We had an amazing speaker at our November meeting. Fruit Explorer, Organic Farmer, and polyglot, Steve Murray had a lot to teach us about organic gardening and how to improve fruit production. We also were treated to slides of some truly exotic fruits and their locations around the world.

We can almost claim credit for Steve's success. He joined CRFG in 1996 and received a scholarship which helped pay for a trip to China, where he could study Chinese - and exotic fruit!

Steve's family owns Murray Family Farms in Bakersfield. (www.murrayfamilyfarms.org) They grow many varieties of exotic fruits, but their main crop, and the one which helps pay for the not-as-profitable ones, is cherries. In particular, exotic golden cherries!!



When they first started growing cherries, the family was not able to get insurance because they were told, "You can't grow cherries in California!" Most cherries require several hundreds of chill hours to produce a good

crop. However, the Murrays focused on lower-chill varieties and developed many ways to not only produce high quality sweet cherries but also start early and produce longer through the year.

Their goal is to grow the earliest ripening cherries in North America. Why? Because the early bird gets the...best price. As each day of Cherry Season passes, the price per box drops. The first box of the season garners the highest price. A 10-pound box of cherries might be sold for \$250 on the first day, but by the last

day of the season the same box will be worth about \$30.

Steve described some of the family farm's favorite methods for high-yield fruit production. Note that while these methods work well in high-volume farms, they might not translate easily to small home gardens. For example, greenhouses. Home growers don't always have the room - nor the finances - for a greenhouse. But they are great for growing temperature-sensitive (and tropical) plants and trees.

Murray Farms has several greenhouses, each covering about half an acre. (32 ft by 100 ft.) The greenhouses have air circulators, and heaters for winter. The family just got approval to add five more hoop houses. Much of the exotic fruit is grown inside the houses.

A variation on greenhouses is cloth. The farm uses several types of fabrics to shade and keep trees cool in summer, but also to keep them warm in winter. Laying bright or reflective cloth on the ground between the rows of trees is called "extende." The cloth reflects light back up into the trees, giving them more hours of light which helps fruit ripen faster. Another use for ground fabric is weed control.

Drip irrigation stays under the fabric, but the Murrays also have overhead sprinklers. Steve says sometimes you can see rainbows above the trees from the evaporative cooling. Another advantage to using overhead sprinklers in winter is that it can increase chill hours a little bit.

(Steve also advised that if you do drip irrigation, you should clean out the lines at least four times a year to clear out sediment build-ups, and make sure critters haven't chewed them up.)

Cherries, when they start dormancy, only need about a third of the water as when they are growing.

During winter, the Murrays use dark colored fabric to absorb sunlight and keep tropical plants warmer. Fabric can protect the trees from hail. Black fabric can also be used to keep vegetables pale and soft. They will place black cloth on the soil's surface to keep asparagus white. (Reduced light means reduced chlorophyll and less green color.)

The protective cloth over their cherry trees gets opened in winter to increase the chill hours. Steve thinks this can add an extra 150 hours of chill.

The Murray citrus trees get extra protection from insects. These are shielded with fine netting, which protects them from insects. But it also helps the fruit produce FEWER seeds. Citrus and pomelos don't need pollination for fruit production; but pollinated fruit will grow seeds.

Entire rows are covered with a huge tunnel of netting. Two people carrying long poles on each side of the row literally drag netting behind them. As they walk, the net unrolls from spools at the beginning of the row. It takes a lot of work, and it's expensive. But it pays for itself in terms of early and regular crops.

One last on-the-tree protection they use is white latex paint to prevent sunburn. White paint also helps prevent shot hole borders because the insects can't breathe through the paint.

In order to increase fruit production, the farm does a few surprising things to their cherry trees. The first is the Kim (or "Kym") Greenbush method of pruning.



The goal of this type of pruning is to have soft green branches, and lots of them, so you can pull down the flexible branches to harvest. The trees are harshly pruned so the fruit producing branches are all young and vertical and flexible. They aim for at least 21 green branches per tree. Advantages:

- The cost of pruning dramatically lowers.
- You no longer need chainsaws.
- You've got tremendously increased production.
- The increased branching also provides more shade and keeps the tree cool.

Steve describes the pruning this way: "Every year you remove the three biggest branches and allow new vertical branches to start growing. Meanwhile the previous (soft) branches will produce fruit. After that, cherries will produce fruit on the same spur year after year. When a branch thickens up so much that we can no longer bend it, we cut it off the next pruning season."

This results in multiple vertical fruiting branches that are easy to harvest. The farm keeps the trees between 10 to 12 feet tall, so harvesting doesn't require ladders or specialized equipment. Steve also said you can force suckering using a growth hormone.

Kim Greenbush pruning is easier to do on a young tree, but you can "stump" an old tree to encourage suckering, thus basically starting from scratch.

Steve said cherry branches will continue to produce on the same spur year after year. That's why you should never strip buds off a branch unless you want an empty spur.

A final way they improve cherry production is to girdle the branches. This is done in the spring, just as the fruit starts to set. The intention is to keep the energy at the top where the fruit grows. Steve says this can give them as much as a seven day earlier harvest.

Girdling involves removing a thin strip of bark less than a centimeter wide all the way around a branch. The leaves produce sugar which would normally go down to feed the roots, but girdling keeps the sugar up at the top and makes the fruit sweeter.

Girdling for early fruit production must be done at the right time. The farmers test the young fruit by cutting one in half. If the seed is hard, then it's time to girdle. If you can stick a knife through the center stone, it's not time yet.

They use a girdling knife, which is a set of two parallel blades, to cut cambium in a ring all the way around a branch. Home

growers can try girdling their own trees, but it's kind



of dangerous if you don't know what you're doing.

Girdling can also reduce vigor because it encourages the bottom growth to take over. The girdled branch will be a little more mellow and other varieties will start taking more energy.

One last piece of cherry trivia: double cherries (two fruit growing on a single stem) form on hot days in the summer. When high temperatures occur during flower bud formation, the buds can become deformed and result in double fruit. Some cultivars are more prone to double fruiting at high budding temperatures.

Once he had exhausted his cherry production information, Steve got to show off some of the exotic fruit he has "hunted" around the world and brought back with him. He grows about 3,000 different rare fruits now and wants to keep going crazy with fruit!



He has traveled to 108 different countries and plans to visit even more. He showed us photos from Africa and China, of Laos, Malaysia, Thailand, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Egypt and Turkey. We saw such amazing fruit as baobab (whose fruit "tastes like Styrofoam and sour cream"), red hearted kiwi, calmei, nicheria, trapa nuts, soap nuts (completely inedible, do not eat! - makes a foamy lather for washing), che, jujube, and chestnuts, Siberian sea berries, mangosteen, abiru, vitoria, sabia, mabungo, and so many more!

By the way, Steve got to climb a baobab tree and it was such a large tree there was a restaurant with 17 seats set up inside!



Interestingly enough, much of the fruit sold in African markets are not grown in local gardens. "Home grown" has a connotation of poverty, and they prefer oranges and apples instead.



How do you bring back rare fruits to the United States? Believe it or not, most of it is already grown here. Between nurseries, specialist growers, and so on, we have access to a remarkable variety from around the world. For example, Roger Meyer brought in a lot of the California jujube varieties. Now they're all over.

Steve says he can bring in seeds, but he can't easily bring in grafts or full-size plants. Grafts can be brought in, but they must be in a soilless environment. They would have to go through LAX quarantine, in addition to many other requirements. It depends on the plant. Citrus is almost impossible to import.

Citrus must go through Washington DC and you're going to pay \$3,000 if you want it to be available to anyone, \$6,000 if you want to keep the genetics to

yourself (patented). Plus, it will take several years to make sure it outgrows any viruses.

So if you're ever in the mood for the earliest, best, and sweetest cherries, look up Murray Family Farms at a farmer's market in summer. They sell their fruit at the Santa Monica Farmers' Market every week. They also sell at the Hollywood Farmers' Market and Augusta Farmers' Market on Sundays. During the summer, they are at 30 different Farmers' Markets each week.

December 7 - Annual Holiday Party

Things were a little different at our annual CRFG-LA holiday party. We had scheduled it for the first weekend in December, so members who are also in other chapters could attend. However, for some reason the Sepulveda Garden Center had been reserved by the Bromeliad Society, who had started their set-up inside the main meeting room about an hour before our chapter arrived. (Their normally scheduled meeting is the first Saturday of every month, in case anyone is interested in joining them. Pineapples are, after all, a bromeliad!)

Working together, we arranged for our party to be on the patio just outside the building. Both garden clubs had full access to the kitchen and bathrooms, and there were plenty of tables available to everyone. The weather couldn't have been more perfect, either. It was sunny and warm and delightful.

Our event was casual and simple. Some people were there that normally wouldn't have been able to attend. We ate first - surprise, we almost NEVER eat first! - and then had announcements. Lydia and Reza Shabestari, Flora Agpalo & Jonathan Ausubel, and Brad Golstein got awards of appreciation.



We discussed our January scion exchange and determined that we will invite non-member guests. Because of this, there will NOT be a potluck at the scion exchange (for the first time ever). We don't want to have bad manners and distractions.

Lunch was a wonderful holiday buffet. Fresh sliced pineapple guavas, two types of homemade cranberry jelly, a gigantic woven challah (egg bread), muffins, dragonfruit, quiche, finger limes, a not-too-spicy curry over rice, and, of course, 10 different flavors of Charles Portney's incredibly delicious homemade fruit sorbets.



The White Elephant exchange was charmingly successful, and all participants loved their new gifts. But one bag was left over and David auctioned it off for \$5. (Two huge pomegranates went to Anwar.)

All in all, everyone had a good time and enjoyed chatting and sharing some amazing foods. See you again in 2025!