



LOS ANGELES CHAPTER

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

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GARDEN TOUR

Date: Saturday, July 27, 10:00 am

Location: Field trip to Mark Steele's house
(Members only, please!)

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 his other obsession with figs kept him here. (He sometimes calls himself a "fig nerd.") Mark will be welcoming us to his home orchard, where he'll show us the many fruits he grows. Members only PLEASE!

GARDEN TOUR

Date: Saturday, August 24, 10:00 am

Location: Field Trip to Jose Ramirez' house
(Members only, please!)

Jose is a man of many talents: he is an elementary school teacher, artist, illustrator, and residential orchardist. He transformed a weedy patch of land into a low-water, fruit-filled paradise in the heart of Los Angeles. In a densely built residential neighborhood, he's crowded more than 250 fruit trees along winding paths; multiple varieties of pluots, apricots, nectarines, apples, citrus and avocados are planted so close that their branches intertwine. We will be touring his lush "food forest" to see how he does it. Members only PLEASE!

Save the date!

CALENDAR FOR L.A. CHAPTER 2024

September 28 To be announced
October 26 To be announced
November 23 To be announced
December 7 Holiday Party

LOOKING BACK

By Deborah Oisboid

May 25 - Kelly Todd Gabrysch Gardens

There are gardens, and then there are Gardens! We got to visit a Garden in May that was incredible in scope and theme. Kelly Todd Gabrysch invited us to see his fabulous plant collection: a forest of rare, quirky and even endangered botanical wonders. If it's unusual and leafy, Kelly is probably trying to coax it into bloom (and fruit!) in his yard.

He loves tropical fruits, especially those which no one else is growing. His favorite species include annona (cousins to cherimoya), eugenia (Surinam cherry and relatives), garcinia (mangosteen), and plinia (jaboticaba). With over 225 plants in the ground and more than 200 in containers, there was a LOT to take in on our visit!

Kelly shares the house and gardens with Matt Henson. Matt has an eye for gorgeous flowers, as evidenced by the many stunningly large, multicolored hibiscus scattered throughout the front and back yards.



Kelly says he has a 90% garden:

- 90% edible
- 90% grown from seed
- 90% fruit trees
- 90% labeled with genus/species
- 90% of fruit gets eaten by rats and squirrels, so they are lucky to get anything. (They use recycled plastic containers to protect fruit.)

Kelly started his love affair with exotic plants while living in a balcony apartment. Orchids were his first passion. When he was ready to expand into fruit, his first tree was a strawberry guava. He jokingly confesses to being a "plant hoarder."

The gardens are constantly changing as Kelly (and Matt) take out older plants and try new ones in their place. As a result, everything is relatively young and packed close together. Some of the trees, which

should ideally be planted 10 - 15 feet apart, grow only a few feet apart!

Kelly likes the challenge of finding the varieties which will survive and then keep growing those out. He also loves educating people about these plants, and has several social media accounts for this purpose.

([Fancyplantsla@Instagram](#), [FancyPlantsLA@Tiktok](#), [FancyPlants@Youtube](#).)

He discovered that Mamey (a sapote variety pronounced "Mah-May") can grow here. He grows many varieties of eugenia. Some taste like cherries and some like mango - so many different flavors!

For about 4 months every year their neighborhood temperature hangs around 34°F without fail. (But no frost.) At the other extreme, the temperature can get as high as 112°F in summertime! Kelly keeps track using thermometers.

Most tropical plants prefer temperatures of 40°F and above. So he looks for plants which can take just a little more cold. Although he does grow some succulents, the garden is not drought tolerant. All of the gardens have a thick layer of mulch. And Kelly frequently tests limits. His jaboticaba was not given water for about 4 months and it did okay. (It did better with extra water, but at least it didn't die.) He thinks the roots get deeper with less water.

Kelly has lived at the house for about 12 years. The original front and back yards were mostly grass. Kelly and Matt would put kitchen scraps, compost, and



mulch from Griffith Park all over and now the ground is about 18" taller and much richer than when they moved in. He says the plants need much less water with all the extra composting

and mulch. Some plants didn't like the original clay soil but now thrive. However, most of his plants still grow in containers. What we saw in the ground had only been planted in the last two years.

Because he started collecting rare plants before the internet took off, Kelly used an importer's license to obtain plants and seeds from Brazil and Portugal. Now he does most of his purchasing online. His favorite sources include HapaJoe Nursery, Trade Winds Fruits, and others.

During our tour, Kelly commented that the front yard is less mature than the backyard but is starting to come into its own. At first glance the front yard has an almost classic suburban look, although with more trees than lawn. But when you look closer, you'll notice an incredible variety of unusually shaped leaves, trees



with fruit growing on the stem, flowers you've never seen before, and the BIGGEST loquats you've ever seen! (Protected from squirrels by plastic clamshells, Kelly called it "Peluche.")

Kelly has a talent for making labels. Some of his plants had printed and

laminated signs full of large paragraphs with photos included. We saw plasticized strip labels wrapped around branches to indicate graft varieties or with special notes such as whether this plant hates the sun or loves water. There are also 3D printed markers stuck in the ground which he brags will never fade.

Excepting the strip labels, all labels include the plant genus and species, the date it was planted, and the source. Next year he wants to do labels with QR codes on them to store more information.



Some of the plants growing in his front yard include the Peluche loquat, jaboticaba, *Plinia Edulus* (aka cambucá), a dwarf avocado, lots of young annonas, black gojiberry, *Austromyrtus Dulcis* (aka

midgenberry), *Hexachlamys Edulis* (aka ubajay), both yellow and orange che, a fuyu persimmon which nearly died but seems to be coming back again, red and white alpine strawberries, and kei apples with thorns 2" long! We learned that kei apples require both male and female plants to produce fruit, and are grown as a hedge in Africa as protection from lions.



Just before entering the backyard, there is a tall fig stem with multiple bands of tags wrapped around it. Everything that he's planning on getting rid of is grafted onto this one tree. It's sort of an experiment. Kelly mostly did cleft grafting this year. (He did chip grafting last year and didn't get anything.)



Kelly says if you want something fun to grow, eugenia species come in all shapes and sizes. Cherry of the Rio Grande (*Eugenia Involucrata*) takes a long time to produce fruit; sometimes the fruit tastes good and sometimes it doesn't. Relatives of this fruit are *Eugenia Uniflora* species such as Surinam Cherry (also known as Pitanga).

He has a vibrant neon orange eugenia, as well as a purple one and a black variety. He's hoping to find a polka dotted variety eventually!!

At one point, he offered a taste of the black eugenia fruit and before anyone commented, he insisted they lie and say it's the best thing they've ever tasted! He also grows these in Hawaii, and they taste the same. It takes about 2 to 3 years for fruit.



The entire backyard is full of rare and exotic plants. Cherimoya, rollinia, papaya, dozens of eugenias (*Taguamada*, *Pyriformus*), *Annona sp. erotica* F4 (which has not yet fruited but his fingers are crossed), mango, yakon root, Sugar Baby dragonfruit, lucuma, *Garcinia mangosteen*, black sapote (which he calls his biggest failure), gin berry, jackfruit (flowered but no fruit yet), yellow jaboticaba with tender leaves, China Katsura tree, *Gasteria* succulents, starfruit (*carambola*), pineapple, rose apple, campo benezia (cousin to guava), and so many more!

Both front and back yards use a drip watering system. It goes on every day, but only for about 5 minutes.



Kelly and Matt themselves built not one but TWO greenhouses in the back yard. The first one was from a kit. The second one, Kelly basically put up wood and nailed the plastic to it.

The first greenhouse contains such exotics as vanilla orchid

(three different varieties!!!) and cacao tree. He also has hoya and carnivorous plants such as *Pinguicula* (butterwort), which uses sticky leaves to trap insects

for their protein. The second greenhouse has seedlings and starters.

One of the most expensive trees in his collection (and the smallest) is a red longan, possibly a Ruby Longan. The leaves never change color. It has red leaves, red flowers, and red fruit. He took such good care of it but when he wasn't paying attention some critter ate all the cambium and now he's working desperately to get it to grow again.

Kelly and Matt own several acres on the Big Island of Hawaii. They have plans to establish a rare fruit sanctuary on the island.

They bought the land in Hawaii, wanting to turn it into a Noah's Ark of fruit trees, with dreams of bringing back endangered species. Any time Kelly gets something excruciatingly rare, he brings it directly to Hawaii to protect it.

Two guys and some shovels can't do much, but they try. They visit several times each year, and they say the soil is so rich that if you put down a barrier cloth, the next day things will be growing on it!



They have Holstein cattle on their island property. With no harsh weather, the cows are very lazy. Someone else cares for the herd while they're away, and they make sure the cattle don't over- or under-graze each section of the property.

We were all sad when the tour finally came to an end. A scrumptious potluck lunch did make us feel a little better, with pastries by Portos, homegrown fruit, breads, and other delicacies. Kelly had placed three avocados on the tables for the lunch but a squirrel managed to walk off with one of them before we came to the tables to eat!

What an amazing place, and what wonderful hosts! Kelly and Matt, we thank you very much for sharing your beautiful and bountiful Gardens with us!

You can see pictures of some of the amazing plants and fruits of Kelly (and Matt's) Gardens at our online chapter photo album:

<https://www.crfg-la.org/piwigo/index.php?category/69>



June 22 - The Annual HUMONGOUS Plant Sale!

An incredible collection of rare plants was available at this year's CRFG-LA HUMONGOUS plant sale. Our local expert Charles Portney introduced them to us and provided colorful tales and interesting information about them. Here's what you could have gotten:



Aeonium, agave, aloe vera, apple rootstock and grafted apple (Pink Lady), artichoke seedlings, Barbados gooseberries, Becky's mystery banana and unknown dwarf bananas, blackberries, bulbine, cactus pear, California live oak, Cape Gooseberry seedlings, chalk sticks, cherimoya (saplings and seedlings), crassula ("Golem's Fingers"), dragonfruit, elephant ear, epazote, epiphyllum, eugenias (Cherry of the Rio Grande and Surinam cherry), fan palm, fig (Violette de Bordeaux, Stroz, and others), gak seedlings, goumi,

grapevines (Blueberry grape, Kyoho, and others), guava (tropical and strawberry), ice cream bean, jaboticaba, jacaranda, lavender (English), lemon verbena (dried), lemon-scented geranium (cuttings), loquat, lucuma seedlings, macadamia seedlings, mint (several varieties), paddle cactus, papaya, Papri-mild paprika (seeds), pepinos (yellow and golden varieties), peppers, pineapple sage, pitcher plant (Sarracenia), plumeria, pomegranate, pussy willow, rose cactus, roses, sapote (white and black), silver teaspoon kalanchoe, spotted squill, stapelia, sugar cane, Tahitian Bridal Veil, thyme, tomato seedlings, turmeric, various succulents, watermelon seedlings, and winter jasmine.

Non-plants offered that day included homemade jam (banana-mandarine, nectaplum-Chinese-5-spice, and other flavors), plant labels, moisture meter, books, pot pads, posters, and placemats. Plus, Bill Brandt offered codling moth pheromone strips for sale.



Some of the interesting things we Charles taught us that day:

Pineapple sage has an incredibly strong scent when you brush the leaves. When Charles prunes it, the smell sticks to him and the hummingbirds come over to investigate.

Cape Gooseberry can be dried like raisins. But it's hard to wait for them to dry because they taste so darned good fresh off the bush!

Aloe vera translates to "true aloe."

Pepinos are melons in the tomato family.

Epazote is a Latin American herb, easy to grow in the ground. It's great in soups and stews.



Up until modern times sugar production in Japan came from persimmons. Nowadays Japanese sugars come from sugar cane, beets, and persimmons.

Paprika is not ground seeds like black (or white) peppercorns. It is powdered, dried peppers. Papri-mild tastes like a medium Hungarian pepper and can be delicious when eaten fresh.

Bernie Storch was a CRFG member from Santa Barbara who passed away recently. He had given a cherimoya to Charles, and it was delicious! Charles hand pollinated it and grew new trees from seed. They turned out to be self-pollinating! Charles offered some seedlings from the self-pollinating cherimoya, which he has named the "Portney-Storch" variety.

Studies say the most healthy and nutritious fruit is the tropical guava.

Goumi is an *Elaeagnus*, which is a nitrogen-fixing plant. In certain parts of the country it's considered invasive.

Black sapote is not a true sapote, it's a persimmon! You know it's ripe when it looks like it needs a dermatologist. The outer skin starts looking kind of funky. The fruit is jet black inside and creamy.

The Blueberry grape has purplish fruit and looks a lot like blueberries. It is a very sweet seedless table grape.



Lucuma is a Peruvian fruit. It is dry outside with a large seed on the inside. Charles thinks it tastes a little like sweet potatoes.

Gac is an Eastern vine which grows melon-sized, spiky yellow fruit with extremely bright red flesh-covered seeds inside. Mostly flavorless, the red surrounding the seeds is used to add color to Asian cuisines.

Ice cream Bean in Costa Rica is a street treat and you will see kids stripping the trees for the fruit. Pick the pods, throw out the seeds, eat the fluff. It is a legume, and a nitrogen fixer.

Barbacoa papaya is grown in Central America like an annual. They chop the trunk down at the end of the season and just stick them in the ground again.



Someone asked if you keep sugar cane in a pot, how often do you change the soil? Charles just adds more soil on top once or twice a year as needed. The whole thing is roots.

The sale was very well organized, with the flow of traffic uncluttered and smooth. The potluck table opened a bit earlier than usual and was overflowing with incredible offerings as well: fresh fruit (pepinos, apples, plums, mulberries), Arabic salad with Mujadarah, rice dumplings, fried rice, Asian noodles with shrimp, homemade cranberry-white-chocolate-chip brownies, and cake.



Many, MANY thanks to all who donated to the event: Charles Portney, Eve Guth & Ed Livingstone, Margaret Frane, Brad Golstein, Yang Bai, Jerry Schwartz, Laura Valenziano, Deborah Oisboid, Monica Saba. (My deepest apologies if I've missed anyone. Your donations were incredibly welcome!)



...And Then Some

How To Cherimoya

Kathleen Doran suggested this extremely useful website which has lots of helpful information all about cherimoya: history, propagation, growing, pollination, pest control, and so much more.

“Back in the early 1990s the California Cherimoya Association decided to put together all their knowledge about the fruit and plant - from history to pollination and costs of production. There are numerous authors who are steeped in love of the fruit. It took several years to bring this all together, finalizing in 1995. It was only available to members of the Association, but now it's available on-line. If you make citation to this work, please recognize the CCA for all the effort that went into it, as well as the individual authors. This is the definitive work on California cherimoyas.”

ucanr.edu/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=60060

Uh oh! HLB Quarantine Boundary Expansion!

This information is about Huanglongbing, or Citrus Greening Disease, a particularly insidious virus which attacks citrus and their relatives. It is most often spread through the Asian Citrus Psyllid, a tiny insect which exudes long strands of wax as they suck the juices of the trees.

Effective June 26, 2024, the US Department of Agriculture is expanding the HLB quarantine boundary in the Commerce area of Los Angeles County in grid 456. A map of the expanded boundary can be found at

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

Good News! Tau Fruit Fly Quarantine Ends!

As of July 1, 2024, the CDFA, in coordination with the USDA and the Los Angeles County Agricultural Commissioner, has declared an end to the Tau fruit fly quarantine following the eradication of the invasive pest.

The Tau fruit fly was first detected in the area in July 2023 and led to the first-ever quarantine for the pest in the Western Hemisphere. The quarantine encompassed the city of Santa Clarita and surrounding areas in parts of Stevenson Ranch, Newhall, Castaic Junction, Oat Mountain, and Del Valle. While several fruit fly quarantines have now been lifted in California, four additional quarantines remain and still threaten the state's natural environment, agriculture and economy.