



LOS ANGELES CHAPTER

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

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GARDEN TOUR – Reza Shabestri

Date: Saturday, May 27, 10:00 am

Location: TBA

We will be touring the lovely gardens of a private residence. For members only, please!

EVENT

Topic: Annual CRFG-LA plant sale extravaganza!

Date: Saturday, June 24, 10:00 am

Location: Sepulveda Gardens, Encino

Remember last year? Just wait until this June! Come one, come all (if you are a CRFG-LA member) and bring your plant offerings with you. All living vegetation donations are welcome: trees, plants, seedlings, seeds, and cuttings if they can be rooted easily. Other garden-related items accepted for auction as well: tools, books, pots, etc. We hope to have Charles Portney do his famous running description of everything for sale. His fabulous and rare plants always get the crowd excited! All members and guests: please bring something to share at our potluck snack table. We are expecting a large crowd!

Save the date!

CALENDAR FOR LA CHAPTER 2023

July 22	Field Trip – George Campos
August 26	Speaker – David Karp: Fruit Adventures
September 23	Speaker - Los Angeles County Beekeepers
October 28	Speaker - Mark Steele
November 18	Speaker – Charles Portney: Pawpaws
December 16	Holiday Party

LOOKING BACK

By Deborah Oisboid

March 25 - Sylmar Agricultural Center/ Annual Tony Stewart Tree Symposium and Fruit Event

Our annual Field Trip to Sylmar High School began in the afternoon instead of the usual morning hour. So we began with lunch - and what a lunch! Pastas, eggs, salads, chili, sushi, sandwiches, shrimp, pizzas, all kinds of fresh fruit, fantastic desserts including three fruit cobblers cooked in cast iron pots. Scrumptious!

As we digested the delicious food, we filled up on useful garden information. Steve answered our questions about growing, planting, pruning, diseases, varmints, and much more. Some of the questions included how to get rid of pests such as squirrels. He admitted he doesn't really have that problem at school because they prefer the cafeteria food!! Silly things.

Someone asked, "When is a good time to plant tomatoes?" He suggested waiting until its a little warmer. A wistaria vine at school is Steve's "tomato alarm." When it begins to bloom, it's good weather to plant tomatoes.

It's been a Very Cold Year for us. Normally Los Angeles gets about 300 chill hours per year. (Chill hours is when the weather goes below 45F.) This year, as of mid-March, Sylmar had received 585 chill hours, nearly double the typical amount! Steve says if you have stone fruit trees which do not produce well this year, you might as well dig them up because this is the best it's going to get for them.

One thing the school does NOT do is spray for insects. They let nature take its course, and their insect and soil health eventually solve any disease problem that has popped up.

Following the Q&A session, Chapter Chair Anwar Hachache presented an award to Eve Guth in recognition of her and Ed Livingston's contributions to our chapter.

Also, Steve List and former CRFG-LA Chair Jim Schopper were recognized for their hard work and all the knowledge they have shared with us over the years.



Our outside tour began in front of a glorious mural, full of colors and symbolism. There were hummingbirds, constellations, phases of the moon, and flowers. And at the bottom were names of people who inspired, assisted, or deserved memoria.



In front of the mural are the Medicinal and Pollinator Gardens, full of flowers such as lavender (Spanish, English and French), 2 varieties of African Blue Basil, Lipstick salvia, milkweed, buddleia, and lantana.

Just inside the fence is the Lathe house in which the cyclamens are just finishing their bloom cycle and Gerbera daisies are just starting. A beautiful water feature is by the classroom, which Steve says is a way to soothe students before class. A row of hummingbird feeders hanging above the water were full of excitable birds, zipping to and fro and fighting over the feeders.

Past the classroom are the potting and vermiculture areas and the recently rebuilt greenhouse full of baby pepper and tomato seedlings, ready for transplanting when the weather is more accommodating.

We learned that everything grown for eating is raised with 100% organic materials (soil, fertilizer, etc.). But bedding and landscape plants are sometimes given artificial fertilizers.

The outside staging area was loaded with 3" and 4" pots, and sixpacks full of flowers and strawberries. Steve advised that the best way to grow strawberries is to take off the first year's fruit and let them establish good roots. Let them drape down the side of the pot,



but don't let berries touch the ground or they will be attacked by sowbugs and earwigs.

Steve's protégé Stefan Strong

took over the tour at this point and showed off the nursery at the rear of the lot. The open structure was loaded with the most enormous rhubarb plants, as well as blueberry bushes, grapevines, dragonfruit vines climbing the poles, and fruit tree saplings.

We strolled underneath several extremely mature fruit trees back to the front of the field. There were jujube, persimmon, mulberry, apple, and guava. Beyond these fruit was a row of lovely citrus trees.

The composting area is hidden from the rest of the yard. Their three huge bins were full of partially and fully finished compost. Cuttings, leaves, and even cafeteria leftovers are mixed together to make delicious toppings for their plants.

At the very end of our exciting tour, a raffle for fruit trees and bags of soil was held. (Ticket sales raised funds for the school gardens.) All plants had been donated courtesy of Steve List's students. Jim Schopper got to call out the numbers and there was a wonderful variety to choose from.



What an amazing day! We had a fantastic meal, learned a lot, and got to be with our friends in a lush and wonderful environment. Many thanks to Steve for hosting us at his school again!

April 22 - Eugene Dinovo/Christine Warren

Our April garden visit was a little different. Instead of our host walking us through and describing everything, one plant (or grouping) at a time, we were provided (text) maps listing every single fruit tree on the property and were able to take self-guided tours of a lovely set of gardens. That also meant no matter whether people arrived early or late, they all got to see everything and knew where everything was. Gene had posted his "map" strategically around his garden in case

someone forgot to print one out for themselves. Then he happily went into detail when asked about a particular tree or gardening method.

A pair of "Forest Pansy" Eastern redbud trees in front, with their lovely maroon heart-shaped leaves and bright pink flowers, were heavily admired as people arrived. And then they saw the fruit trees. Gene has arranged his garden so there is plenty of room to walk around, but still intensive enough to pack in more than 50 fruit trees and vines. He has figs, persimmons, pomegranates, grapes, dozens of varieties of stone fruits, guava, avocado, citrus, Surinam cherry, apples, sapote, pear and Sicilian white loquat (Nespole). He also has *Cereus* and Nopal cacti, many types of grapevines and blueberry bushes, rows of berry vines, and dragonfruit. And then there are the planters full of vegetables. A cornucopia of plantings!



His apparent current favorite is the Mirabelle plum, of which he has a one-year-old tree, but he is grafting it onto other stone fruit trees as a just in case "backup."

The trunks of the White Thai Guava in front and the Loquat in the back are partially wrapped with a sheet of hard plastic to deter varmints. Gene says that with these barriers, he now only loses about half the fruit!!

There is a Hass avocado loaded with flowers in front, with a heavily pruned "seedling" avocado next to it. After 7 years, the seedling has not produced anything, and he is now grafting other varieties onto it. He suspects the Hass is getting pollinated by his neighbor's avocado (which produces more than his own avocado.)

Freshly brewed coffee, bottled water and dried fruits were provided on the patio table, as were the delightful snacks which CRFG-LA members brought. Wonderful cakes and cookies and "brownie bites", as well as some exotic mini-skewers with meatballs, cheese, basil, and

tomatoes, drizzled with a delicious olive oil marinade. Gene has built sturdy trellises and climbing structures for his vines out of metal electrical conduit and heavy gauge wire cates. He says they are easy to assemble and very forgiving if you don't use threaded fasteners (which have to be more exact). He simply slip-fits them together and adjusts as needed. The frames have been standing for 10 years and are still going strong.

Gene gave a demonstration of his favorite hand-tool to cut grafts. Part clippers, part custom grafting cutter, it cuts twigs into regular "V" or "U" shape profiles. It is easy to slide the sliced scions into rootstock branches when the profiles match so nicely. (You still have to match the diameters first.)



Grafting Tool and sample cuts

Gene's grafting "lesson learned" this year was to graft as close to the rootstock trunk as possible so as to direct and concentrate the rootstock Xylem sap flow to the scions. He thinks grafting suckers is a great method.

The garden wasn't always so full of food. Gene's family has owned the house since 1977. In the 1980's, his father visited from Sicily. He took one look at a backyard full of pines, junipers, and clusters of birds of paradise and other ornamentals - "*Piante inutile!*" exclaimed his Dad. (Italian for "Useless plants!") He spent the next 10 days digging up the birds of paradise clumps. "He was in his 80s and still worked his butt off," recalls Gene. He and his father planted the very first fruit tree together: a Mission fig. The second fruit tree to go in was the Sicilian white loquat given to Gene by the Sicilian father of a coworker. Both trees are still living and producing delicious fruit. The 'Son Of Black Mission' and two Loquat seedling trees are producing fruits as well.

Christine Warren, Gene's coworker at that time, became

his go-to when it came to gardening and plants. She advised and still advises him about gardening and fruit trees, and just recently encouraged him to join the CRFG. They have remained good friends since then.

The garden makeover slowed down as Gene and his wife raised their three children. And now, he says, it is a playground for the grandchildren. Gene's wife suddenly passed away last year. He says that keeping busy by taking care of the garden, planting six new trees and several new vegetable planters has been therapeutic, helping him recover from the trauma of that loss.

He has a special place (a "man shed") to sit, relax, contemplate and look over the garden. It also has a view of the entire valley looking north towards the hills. The hills are so green this year that a friend described them as looking like "a bit of Ireland."

Christine still helps and advises him with his orchard,



vegetable garden, and occasionally shows off the beautiful produce. The day of our visit (with Gene's permission) she harvested and sliced some plum-sized Mikado turnips for visitors to taste.

White, about 1 - 2" diameter, mildly crunchy, and slightly sweet with a hint of spice. "Only 6 weeks old!" Christine bragged as people tasted them.

Our visit was lovely and leisurely. The gardens were immaculate and lush, and full of wonderful things. We strolled, asked questions, learned a lot, and had a most pleasant visit, with a most gracious host. Thank you so much Gene, for a delightful afternoon!

OFFER: ROOM TO RENT WITH GARDENS
Room to rent/house to share in peaceful Simi Valley. Must love plants, gardens, exotic fruit, dogs and outdoor water features. (You do not have to garden but your opinion will be frequently asked for.) Lots of amenities. Some flexibility on price. If interested, email roomforrent_1@crfg-la.org for price, location, photos, and more information.