



LOS ANGELES CHAPTER

2022 Volume XXVII Issue 6

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

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DOUBLE EVENT (in person)

Date: Saturday, November 19, 10:00 am
Location: Sepulveda Garden Center
16633 Magnolia Blvd. Encino 91406
Topic: Ask the Expert - PLUS End-of-year
Garden/Plant Sale

It's time for a little Fall Cleaning. We're having an end of year catchall event. Do you have a gardening question? Ask our chapter experts for help. You can send questions in before the event to editor@crfg-la.org and we will make sure they get answered. We are also holding a Garden Sale, and we welcome your donations of potted plants and trees, seeds, pots, book, tools, or other garden-related items. And don't forget to bring a little something for our snack table.

SPECIAL EVENT (in person)

Date: Saturday, December 10, 10:00 am
Location: Sepulveda Garden Center
16633 Magnolia Blvd. Encino 91406
Topic: Annual CRFG-LA Holiday Party

It's our annual holiday party! There will be laughter and friendship, a White Elephant gift exchange, and maybe even a few plants for sale. There will also be some of the best food of the year. (With your help - please bring something for our full potluck lunch.)

Save the date!

CALENDAR FOR LA CHAPTER 2023

January 28	Scion exchange
February 25	To be announced
March 25	Sylmar Agricultural Field Trip
April 22	To be announced
May 27	To be announced
June 24	To be announced
July 22	To be announced
August 26	To be announced
September 23	To be announced
October 28	To be announced
November 18	To be announced
December (TBA)	Holiday Party

LOOKING BACK

By Deborah Oisboid, Editor

September 24 – Are Finger Limes a Fad? (Zoom)

Finger Limes are tiny fruit, an inch or two long and about half an inch in diameter. Their tart, zesty pulp grows in tiny beads and is called "citrus caviar" because of its appearance when squeezed out of the shell. They are considered exotic and can cost upwards of \$32 for 8 limes on Amazon.com.

We had a new point of view of them in September. Dr. Trent Blare, an Assistant Professor in the Food and Resource Economics Department at the University of Florida, spoke to us via Zoom. His presentation on Finger Limes illustrated the methodology of bringing a "fad" fruit into a free market. His goal was to answer the question whether this citrus will remain relegated to the status of "exotic" and only be found in specialty shops, or if it will gain enough popularity to become a commonly found item at your local grocery store.

Specialty and unusual foods (dragonfruit, jackfruit, starfruit, etc) are gaining in popularity. In the 1990's, avocados were a niche market. Now avocados are everywhere! Finger Lime growers would love to have an avocado-like success.

Increased popularity means increased sales. Increased sales encourage an increase in production. But there is always a risk that the market might not meet the hype. For example, kale and hemp became briefly popular, and while sales increased, they didn't quite explode.

We learned that market research goes hand in hand with product development, or else you get overproduction and bankrupt farmers. Growers need to gauge "how much" to grow in order to stay in business.

Dr. Blare asked us how well Finger Limes are doing in California - do we see them in farmer's markets? Several CRFG chapter members said they don't often see them in markets. On the other hand, several more chapter members expressed interest in growing them!

Dr. Blare described how market research helps develop the potential for growth. (Literally.)

His research is focused on questions like these:

- How much do consumers know about the product?
- Will middle class consumers be interested in eating it?
- Should growers take the risk in planting more?
- How is the supply chain? Are there bottlenecks?

All of these questions need market information.

One advantage Finger Limes have over other citrus is that they appear to be resistant to the debilitating Citrus Greening Disease (*Huanglongbing*). Dr. Blare suggested that fact should be folded into the marketing.

We learned about the latest sensation in Finger Limes: the University of Florida's "SunLime." Its red skin and



pulp are stunningly bright colors, and many chapter members immediately asked how they could acquire grafting material. (Answer: they can't right now. California does not allow imported stock, even though they aren't supposed to carry Greening disease.)

We then went on a field trip of marketing techniques. First is market evaluation. There is currently a growing demand from chefs and mixologists for Finger Limes. Next, they evaluate what buyers and processors have to say: what sensory attributes do they look for, what fruit pairings might be popular. This information is evaluated to get insights on marketing outlets and pricing.

UF brought their red SunLimes to an industry trade show in March 2022, and later to about 80 consumers at a tropical fruit fair in June 2022. After sampling the fruit, panelists scored it on flavor and uses, and suggested how much they would be willing to pay for certain quantities of fresh and processed (frozen) pulp.



People gave the highest scores to the color of the red peel, followed by the jewel-like appearance of the pulp.

Food pairings: The majority of people surveyed thought the limes would be best in cocktails (85% positive) and salads (82.5% positive). Other positive ratings paired the limes with seafood (70%), desserts (70%), and poultry (47.5%).

When asked what market the limes should target, the first choice was high end restaurants and bars. Second was high end retail and specialty stores. Only 15% considered traditional supermarkets. In other words,

people still see Finger Limes as a niche fruit.

On the subject of pricing, most people (71%) were willing to pay \$3 for 1.4 ounces (40gr) of fresh finger limes, and a majority (65%) would pay \$6.50 for 0.8 ounces (22.4gr) of frozen lime pulp. (Twice the price for pure pulp.)

Frozen fruit has a lower profit margin. Although it's easier to ship and sell processed/frozen pulp, it is not as popular.

In the end, Dr. Blare's research showed a strong public interest in red pulp Finger Limes, and suggested targeting high end hotels, bars, restaurants and specialty stores. It also showed the price sensitivity for frozen vs fresh fruit.

The next part of his research will include more interviews and more market analysis.

Dr. Blare's ultimate goal is to see hundreds of acres of farmland growing Finger Limes for profit, instead of remaining a niche flavor. He would love to see Finger Limes in local grocery stores! Like dragonfruit, they're slowly becoming more popular. And, hopefully, they will "make it" soon!

Building a market for a (new) product is a long process.

To learn more about Finger Limes, Dr. Blare recommends:

edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/FE1033

australianlimes.ifas.ufl.edu/

One potential source for finger lime budwood is CCPP:

<https://ccpp.ucr.edu/onlineOrdersV2/> - to order scions

<https://citrusvariety.ucr.edu/crc3672> - RedLime info

We learned quite a lot about a new fruity subject from Dr. Blare and we thank him very much for sharing his knowledge with us!

October 23 – Shulman Dragonfruit Orchard Tour

October's field trip was unusual for a couple of reasons.

First, it was held on a Sunday instead of Saturday, because of the venue. Second, we had a delightful catered lunch instead of potluck, for the same reason.

At the beginning of the Pandemic, Alik Shulman had too many dragonfruit but not enough space to grow them. (Sound familiar, anyone?) He ended up making a deal with his local Chabad House, arranging to rebuild an empty lot into a functional dragonfruit orchard.

A Chabad House is a Jewish community center, which also functions as a center for education, outreach, and other activities of the Chabad-Lubavitch (Hasidic Jews).

The Shulman Orchard, as it is called, rests on a plot of about 5000 square feet, is lined with weed barrier, and contains over a hundred 45-gallon containers, each with a 5-foot-tall trellis in the center. Planters contain a custom blend of soil designed specifically for dragonfruit, topped with 3 inches or more of mulch to reduce water loss. They have lots of drainage and air circulation on the sides.

The robust wooden trellis can support multiple plants in each container. Some structures are roped down in the corners to keep a good balance. Each structure is labeled with the variety (or varieties) in the planter, and sometimes state the origin of the plants. A few of the vines were growing gorgeous flowers (starting to close during daytime) and some even had fruit. Alik now has about 45 varieties with white, red, yellow, and magenta flesh fruit, such as:

- Valdivia Roja
- Delight
- Halley's Comet
- Sugar Dragon
- Giant Vietnam White
- Purple Haze
- Cosmic Charlie
- American Beauty



Before the tour, Alik gave us an introduction and brief history of the orchard. He fell in love with dragonfruit about 17 years ago when he bought one from a hardware store nursery (Orchard Supply). That was his only plant until about two years ago. When the Pandemic hit, he had extra time on his hands and began studying to learn why his plant had never fruited. When he found out that it needed cross-pollination, he contacted other growers online and began collecting cuttings and purchasing more plants. Soon he had too many for his own yard and accepted an offer from the Rabbi of the Chabad house to convert an empty area of their property into an orchard for meditation, tours, enjoying flowers, and sharing the fruit with the community.

Alik praised dragonfruit as a terrific choice for drought tolerant gardening. Each plant only needs one gallon of water per week! He also discussed hand pollination and showed us a tool he uses to collect pollen at night: a small, hand-held, battery-powered vacuum cleaner. (The type used to clean computer keyboards.) He stores the pollen either in



the refrigerator for up to a few weeks, or in the freezer for up to a month. The pollen is applied at night between 10pm - 12am, when the flowers are open. Successful pollination will produce fruit within 30 days.

https://www.amazon.com/Cordless-Computer-Portable-Rechargeable-Cleaner/dp/B074SJLGXW?ref=ast_sto_dp

The Orchard itself is beautifully laid out and nicely labelled. Alik talked about the various fruits and their history. Edgar Valvia, our chapter dragonfruit expert, also happily answered general questions about growing the vines. (Many of the plants in the Orchard had been obtained from his own collection.) There were also a few volunteer gardeners present who could answer questions.



A couple of chairs were set up under certain plants with some sliced dragonfruit and a clipboard. These were vines which had no identification, and Alik was hoping CRFG visitors might be able to identify them from the fruits' flavor and appearance. (He had only minimal success. Maybe he will try again next year!)

Alik is particularly happy with the Laverne Red variety (magenta color fruit). It can put out over 30 flowers in one season and has produced fruit up to 5 times per year. One year the Laverne plant grew 3 lb fruit!

After the tour we enjoyed a delicious catered lunch of sandwiches and sushi. It was topped off with freshly made dragonnade (dragonfruit lemonade), plus slices of four varieties of dragonfruit to sample: Halley's Comet, Physical Graffiti, Laverne Red, and Sugar Dragon.

Scrumptious!



CRFG member Wai-Ling Chow brought a bag of large and plump roselles from her garden, which had a sharp, lemon flavor. (Roselles, or "jamaica," are the calyxes of hibiscus flowers, commonly used for tea.)

All in all, it was a delightful day. It was wonderful to get together with other CRFG members in person after so long, and the tour and food was

icing on the cake. Many thanks to Alik for sharing his lovely Orchard with us, and for a splendid dragonfruit experience. We hope to have an opportunity to visit again soon!

CLASSIFIED/WANT ADS

WANTED: CRFG Program Chair

Our chapter is looking for an energetic, imaginative person to find new speakers and arrange field trips. Duties include coming up with (up to) 10 ideas for events, tours, or speakers; contacting potential speakers or tour sites, and coordinating dates and times. Other CRFG-LA officers will be available for advice or assistance whenever possible.

WANTED: Group purchase of fireblight spray

If anyone needs help treating apple fireblight, please contact Aura Carmi via the newsletter editor (editor@crfg-la.com) She is interested in purchasing a biological spray applied during apple dormancy which is actually a virus that kills fireblight. She has tried two variations with some success. The problem is the treatment is extremely expensive! Does anyone want to go in and buy the treatment to share?

<http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7414.html>

WANTED: Fig label information for next year's Scion Exchange

Next year, when you are preparing fig cuttings for the January Scion Exchange, please include on your label whether the fruit is CLOSED EYE or OPEN EYE. This is helpful because the many pests and diseases can enter through open fig eyes (ostioles).