



LOS ANGELES CHAPTER

2020 Volume XXV Issue 5

CRFG-LA meetings at Sepulveda Garden Center are currently suspended. We hope everyone is staying safe and healthy.

Upcoming Chapter Zoom Meetings

For those without computer or smartphone, you will miss the visuals, but you can still listen to the audio stream. Instructions will be sent as soon as we set things up.

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

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ZOOM MEETING:

Saturday, September 26, 10:00 am

Speaker: Dr. Matt Daugherty

Topic: Biology and Management of Arthropod Pests in the Garden

With approximately 1 million known species, and perhaps millions more still unidentified, insects represent a major part of worldwide biodiversity. Dr. Matt Daugherty, a faculty member in the Dept. of Entomology at UC Riverside, studies population and community ecology, particularly pest management of invasive insects and plant diseases. Current projects include studies of the Asian citrus psyllid, the resurgence of Pierce's disease, and the invasive *Bagrada* bug. He will provide a brief overview of "backyard bugs," discuss some of the main concepts in entomology, and offer recommendations for dealing with some of the more common arthropod pests in our Southern California home gardens.

We want your bugs! Before the September meeting, please contact one of the CRFG-LA board members to suggest what insects you are interested in learning about. This will help focus Matt's presentation and make it particularly relevant to our members.

ZOOM MEETING

Saturday, October 24, 10:00 am

Speaker: Noel Ramos

Topic: The Fruit and Edible Plant Hunters: The brave people who roam the world to bring back the best and rarest fruits and edible plants

Noel's enthusiasm for tropical agriculture started while he worked at his grandfather's mountain coffee farm in Puerto Rico during school breaks from his university studies in Puerto Rico in the early 1980. At his home in Fort Lauderdale, Noel is currently growing many rare tropical fruits including Abiu, Breadfruit, Achachairu, Sapotes, Jackfruits, Mangos, Coffee, Cacao and many others. In his spare time he also lectures throughout Florida and out of state about tropical fruit, sustainable agriculture, and green living. He has traveled extensively to botanical gardens, agricultural research stations, and private farms throughout the U.S., Europe, the Caribbean, and Central America.

CANCELLED:

Annual Dragon Fruit Festival

Please see Ed Valdivia's article below.

Words From Our Chairman

By Jerry Schwartz



Things have been totally upside down in the first year of my chairmanship. First, the schools closed, cancelling our annual Sylmar High event. Then Margaret and Karen contacted me about having a Zoom meeting instead of an in-person one at Sepulveda Gardens. I was confused. How the “heck” does CRFG-LA have a meeting without live attendance? Our meetings are about plant exchanges! And FOOD!

But Margaret Zoomed Steven Murray on his farm, which was followed by several improv-to-Zoom visits to several members’ gardens. This transformed the meetings – seeing gardens and hearing descriptions of plants! (It used to be a problem to hear with 60 members in front of me.) I now understand the wonders of Zoom.

After a cool start to the year, a super heat wave hit in late July and continued through August. I’ve been watering, which the new plants and trees needed. To date, no trees lost. The most significant change is the tomatoes stopped fruiting. I’m finding green half-eaten persimmons on the ground. Aren’t squirrels and opossums just large rats!!!

It’s September already! I can now check for new releases by Dave Wilson Nursery and Bay Laurel Nursery. As the weather cools, I’ll be planting winter vegetables and some potted fruit trees. Hopefully by December, we’ll all be vaccinated and COVID-19 will be under control. Hopefully we will have a great scion exchange in January!

Jerry

Jack Silva, 1939-2020



Jack Silva, companion and husband to Candace Rumenapp, passed peacefully at home of natural causes in his own bed on Saturday August 22. He was 81 years old. Jack and Candace were together for over 45 years. They were married about three years ago, and our chapter was delighted to congratulate them!

Born in Hawaii, the great outdoors has always attracted Jack. He took agriculture classes in High School and worked on a chicken farm in Hawaii. His favorite flower was roses, ever since he and Candace went to England together. He also loved eating persimmons and watching hummingbirds visit his garden in the Valley. He and Candace grew white ginger, part of his Hawaiian heritage.

Our affection and sadness are with Candace at this sorrowful time.

LOOKING BACK

By Deborah Oisboid, Editor

July 25 – Seed Saving – David King

July's meeting was all stories, without pictures or videos or tours. It was fascinating!

David King is a Seed Saver. He is also the Garden Master of The Learning Garden, a school garden in Venice, California, founded by Julie Mann and David Crow. (www.thelearninggarden.org)

He loves the Garden because he thinks it is important for kids to see the green and soil, to see where food and other things comes from.

David also founded the Seed Library of Los Angeles (SLOLA). A woman suggested the idea to him in 2009.

After some research, David says, "I realized that it would be a bunch of work. I positively have an allergy to work." But he did it anyway. SLOLA's first "real" meeting was held in January, 2011. From 24 initial members, SLOLA now boasts over 800 members.

Currently SLOLA is sharing over 260 different varieties of food crop seeds, primarily annuals. Members (and others, with restrictions), may "check out" a few packs of seeds at a time. The seeds are planted, and grown to maturity. Then the gardener saves the seeds from the plants and sends them back as "payment" for the seed loan. (<https://www.slola.org> and www.facebook.com/SeedLibraryLA.)

"You can spot a hard-core seed saver from a long way away," says David. "Their fingers are full of leaf cuts and their knees are full of dirt."

David told us there are two ways to save seeds: locally and not-locally. SLOLA is an example of local seed saving. So are the seeds you have at home from your own garden. An example of saving seeds not-locally is the Svalbard Global Seeds Vault in the Arctic Circle.

Did you know you can send your own seeds to Svalbard? Unfortunately, they already had one disaster: their permafrost is melting, and in 2017 water entered one of the tunnels. No seeds were damaged but it was a valuable warning.

Why save seeds? It's plant genetics and how we make them work better for us. David takes his cues from traditional farmers: save the seeds from the BEST plants and use those next year. Hybrids do not grow true to seed, so saving hybrid seeds does not guarantee what will happen the following year. (This also forces farmers to buy new seeds year after year. A lot of heritage is lost that way. Loss of seed diversity is tragic.)

Why save seeds in Los Angeles? A lot of garden books do not offer advice compatible with our local growing conditions. We live in a Mediterranean climate. Only four other locations in the world have this climate, and that's it. (Chile, the Mediterranean basin in the Middle East, the Cape region of South Africa, and Southwestern/South Australia.) David suggests throwing out most garden book advice, except the parts which apply to our own climate.

Seeds obtained from somewhere else will do best in the Other Climate, the one in which they grew up. Saving local seed year after year will yield plants which prefer the local climate.

Stored seeds need three things: a Dry, Cool, and Dark environment. A refrigerator is close, but can sometimes be too moist to do this properly.

How do you know which plants to let go to seed? Let's say you grow 15 plants. Watch as they grow. Just as they reach peak ripeness, select a few fruit and tie a bag or other identifier around them. Then eat the rest!

Many questions were asked throughout the presentation. How to prevent cross-pollination? (Flowers with internal stamens do not typically crossbreed.) How do you make sure seeds arrive safely through the mail? (Packaging, and choose cool weather when you ship!) Does SLOLA do fruit tree seeds such as kei apples? (Not usually.) How do you grow seedless fruit? (Use the same two parent plants. But why would you do that, when it means you miss out on the seed-spitting contests!?)

At one point Ed Valvidia commented on his attempts to cross pollinate dragonfruit with other epiphytes to get a day-blooming flower. The fruit from the resulting plants all have sterile seeds. "But it kept you out of trouble for many years!" joked David.

It was a very enjoyable and social event (at a distance). We thank David King very much for sharing with us some of his great ideas, as well as his particular brand of humor to brighten our day!

August 22 - Solving Garden Problems with CRFG
Our August meeting started off with some cheerful banter and shared photos of some amazing fruit that people had grown, such as figs and mangoes. The discussion topic was Garden problems, and a LOT of good advice was shared.

It was quite interesting, and reasonably well organized for a potentially chaotic event. People were patient, the questions were written down in the Chat window for all to see, and we were able to discuss all of them before noon!

A lot of questions were about fruit production. Small fruit, sour fruit, no fruit, too many fruit! The proposed answers were just as varied: this year's (exceedingly hot!) weather reduces fruit production. More water or fertilizer could encourage fruit production. Trim excess fruit or branches back to produce larger fruit. Bill suggested his favorite solution several times: "Abandon the variety!" He suggested drastic pruning back to a few feet tall and

grafting new varieties onto the tree ("top working"). Bill grafts onto $\frac{1}{2}$ " diameter twigs which grow from the stumps, or you could do bark grafting which is trickier and may require specialty tools.

The question about Dennis' kei apple which was not sweet drew suggestions of which variety is best. Karen mentioned that she had grown kei apples multiple times from seed but each plant had different sweetness: some were good, some were just "meh," and some were very sour.

Laura's potted blackberries were turning brown and not producing fruit. Suggested solutions included adding fertilizer, trimming the center and letting the sides grow out, flushing with water to remove salt, and moving the pot to the shade or painting the pot white to cool off the roots.

Steven's Capulin cherry developed spotted leaves, with the "spots" actually protruding from the leaf surface. Someone suggested shot hole fungus, which looks similar. However shot hole does not grow additional material on the leaf. He was advised to call a specialist, perhaps UCI, UCAR, IPM or the Ventura County Master Gardeners.

An insect on Ron's mulberry leaves was identified as a glassy-winged sharpshooter. They are a vector insect, which means they carry diseases! In particular, the sharpshooters carry Pierce's disease, but parasitic wasps might be a possible biological control. Oleander is susceptible to Pierce's disease, and it can transfer easily to grapes and fruit trees. Several people advised him to cut back any oleander, and to press his neighbors to cut back their oleander as well!

Additionally, Ron's pepper plants have blossom end-rot. He was advised to maintain even watering. Sagi waters his peppers daily, about 1 liter per plant.

Kevin's strawberry fruit has been turning brown and mushy. The group suggested it might be due to over-watering. A good soil test is to push your finger into the soil. If the soil is moist within the first 1 - 2 inches of the surface, do not water. Strawberries like a low pH around 5: perhaps add a little vinegar when watering.

Blueberries also prefer low pH and do best in pots because our local soil is quite alkaline. If you plant

them in peat moss, the peat moss will lose acidity overtime.

To acidify soil pH, add 1 cup (white) vinegar per 1 gallon of water. Tiger 90CR™ can be used to improve acidity. Pelleted sulfur also works and lasts a long time. West Valley Nursery has pelletized sulfur.

By the way, apple cider vinegar plus soap can prevent fruit flies indoors.

Margaret had a miracle berry tree which died. She added vinegar and water and it came back. She managed to bring it back to life three times before she finally gave up on the plant.

David's potted persimmon is droopy and unhappy. At first the group thought it was a root problem. Persimmons have very deep tap roots and do not like being in pots. Perhaps there is some root knot, which can strangle a tree. He was advised to replant it in the ground, but first to remove all soil from the roots to make sure it doesn't have any root problems.

Can you pick macadamia nuts while they are still green? One gardener has a wonderful tree but the squirrels have stolen all the nuts for the last 5 - 6 years. The advice was swift and emphatic: "NO!"

Karine wanted to know how much water to give a lemon or lime tree? 15 to 20 gallons per week minimum. Drip watering only gets a small area, so spray 5 to 10 minutes in a wider area to increase soil moisture at the root surface. And mulch! Wood chip mulch is great!

Margaret got a cardoon. What do you do with it? Italians love to eat the stems (not the flowers, which look like artichoke). Peel, boil, and add lemon to prevent browning.

Rami wants to know if there is a fig that tastes like guava? No one could suggest one with a guava flavor, but someone said he has a variety called "Sanguie Dolce" which tastes like blueberries and dates.

Edgar had some cherimoya pollination advice. Around 3 or 4 pm, hose down the entire tree to increase humidity. The humidity will improve pollination and sometimes you don't have to hand-pollinate the cherimoya flowers.

A recommended source of avocado trees: Louie's Nursery #2 in Riverside. They carry a huge variety, maybe more than 30 varieties for about \$90 each.

Christine showed us two tiny pineapple fruits on her plants. They get lots of heat on the patio, and there are multiple crowns in the pot. She drops rotting apples inside the crown, which she says produces ethylene gas, and encourages flowers.

We took a virtual garden tour of Bill's yard. We saw apples, figs, mangoes, pears, grapes, and more. He showed us how he bags the fruit to keep the birds from eating it. (The secret: clip the bags at the neck so critters can't get inside.) In his front yard are a Bengal Lychee and Rooster Lychee, ten feet tall trees with thick clumps of luscious fruit. Also, a seven-year-old macadamia nut tree. He lives in Thousand Oaks, about 10 or 20 miles from the ocean. He had to admit he does not have a lot of squirrels.

There was plenty of advice about squirrels, squirrel tube traps, pest control, and other ways to prevent squirrels from getting to your fruit. Some resources include Amazon (tube traps), Pest Control, and www.wildlifecontrolsupplies.com/animal/WCSTUBERR.html.

Did you know it is legal in California to kill ground squirrels (they are classified as a "nongame" animal)? But tree squirrels are considered "game animals" and can be taken only during hunting season, AND with a hunting license. (You can get an out-of-season permit if you can prove damage to property.) But it is NOT legal to trap and release them in another location.

(For more information about squirrel hunting, check out <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74122.html>.)

To get rid of dead squirrels, put them in a garbage bag, then double bag and drop the dead animal in the (black) trash bin.

The meeting ended with a lively discussion about our Scion exchange this coming January. Can it be done "virtually?" Perhaps set up different houses for different types of scions? One house has the plum scions, another has avocados, and so on. Perhaps online and everyone sends to Independent people? More ideas are welcome.

It was a very enthusiastic and enlightening meeting, and I, for one, learned an awful lot! Many thanks to everyone who participated.

Missing Dragons in 2020

By Ed Valdivia

Hi Folks,

During the sad times our country is going through, we are blessed to have the hobby of loving nature. Because of this hobby, we are involved in growing so many different, wonderful fruits and vegetables in our gardens.

We pitahaya/dragon fruit lovers have always looked forward to our yearly Dragon Fruit Festival, where we listen to very good speakers, see the plantation of fruit being grown, and taste the wonderful varieties. This year is different. After 16 years of holding the Dragon Fruit Festival, we have had to cancel it because of the Covid19. Even though we cannot get together to share our love for this great fruit, I would like to give you a short update on the latest events related to the dragon fruit.

1. Many of the younger generation are now very involved in grafting, growing, creating new varieties, and promoting the dragon fruit. Thank you Paco Frausto, Richard Le, and Donovan Vasta, to name a few.
2. Commercial farming is growing in California and Florida. More and more backyard growers are also beginning to plant different varieties all over the United States.
3. Foreign countries realize the interest Americans have in dragon fruit, so they are cultivating this fruit in their countries for exportation. This gives us the opportunity to taste varieties that are difficult to grow here in the U.S. because of the weather. Also, this increase in production will help lower the price so that the average American can afford to buy them.
4. As for me, Edgar, (remember I am 80 years old), I am still working on promoting and improving the fruit. I continue working on the Asunta line-red flower. I am now working on Asunta 6.

So I have reached one of my goals: a self-fertile variety that is good size and has an excellent taste. The only thing I have not yet accomplished is to get a flower

that will stay open in daytime so that bees will do the pollination and we will be able to enjoy the beauty of this flower in daytime.

I recommend that you cross pollinate your flowers from the dragon with epiphyllum or any other plant that might accept the pollen of the dragon fruit. Maybe after planting those hybridized seeds you might be lucky enough to get a flower that stays open in the daytime and a fruit with good flavor.

5. After so many years, there are even TV commercials showing dragon fruit being used in various drinks. It also is used in ice cream, liquor, as refreshments, dried, and in many other creative recipes that foreign countries are using. Remember, the dragon fruit is not like 20 years ago when I started - there were only 5 people growing them in California. It is now a global fruit and used in many applications.

6. I want to warn you that high technology can sometimes not be trusted. One example of this is Leo Manuel who had a site on Yahoo groups called "Pitaya Fruit." On that site were close to 3000 members worldwide who, **over a period of 18 years**, often posted and shared their experience and knowledge with each other. Sadly, Yahoo decided to close Yahoo groups and because of this all **the valuable information posted there over those 18 years was LOST**. Always back up your information so it will not be lost and you will be in control!

I want to thank Gray Martin for his 20 years of hard work, for believing in this fruit and its future. He is now one of the biggest growers in the United States.

Thank you to the UC Cooperative Extension which supported Ramiro Lobo and his team in the difficult work of experimenting and promoting the dragon fruit in California. Thank you to all the members of California Rare Fruit Growers (Paul Thomson) who have put their enthusiasm to work in this particular fruit.

Thank you to the many others who have dedicated so much time and work in this project. I apologize if I did not mention you by name.

Thank you to my wife, Patricia, who tolerates and supports me in all my projects, and in the process also learned to love nature and all its bounty!

Edgar Valdivia

PS Here is a link where you can see my latest project with the dragon fruit

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dh-w0-hy3hE>

Editor's Column (With Classifieds!)

OFFER: Garden pest advice

Candace suggests: a certain type of mite or thrip can cause roses to look sunburnt. Remove damaged foliage and it will grow back healthier.

WANTED: Female Gac, Object:Pollination

Ray Tyndall's Gac tree is producing only male flowers. He is seeking someone with female flowers to share pollen. Location is in the city of Burbank. There is a good chance Ray will waive any stud fee for his tree's valuable services. If interested in a (male) cutting or pollen, please contact the editor: editor@crfg-la.org. (The CRFG-LA plant dating service is now in business!)



OFFER/FOR SALE: Macadamia & Monstera plants

Macadamia nut trees and Monstera plants for sale. Part of the proceeds will go to benefit our CRFG chapter.

- 1 gallon Macadamia "pups" = \$5 each (please bring your own container).
- 3-foot -tall macadamia saplings = \$60
- One 15 gallon macadamia tree = \$90.
- About five Monstera = \$30 to \$50 based on size

Willing to trade larger plants for Alphonso Mango or Jaboticaba or Tango Mandarin or both male & female Kiwi or delivery of 1 cubic yard of bio char from Michael in Thousand Oaks. Please contact the editor for more information: editor@crfg-la.org.

WANTED: Garden Pests (Insects)

September's speaker will discuss insects in the garden. If there is a particular insect you are having problems with, or that would like more information about, please contact editor@crfg-la.org. The request will be forwarded to Dr Matt Daugherty and he will include it in his presentation to us at the end of the month.

Have a suggestion? A question? A story to share? Send it to editor@crfg-la.org and see it published here!