LOS ANGELES CHAPTER

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FIELD TRIP
Date: Saturday, July 25, 10:00 am
Location: **Jim & Eileen's Garden, Sylmar**
Event: Home garden visit – for CRFG members only

Jim and Eileen's garden adventure began over 20 years ago with the creation of what they call the "Citrus Grove": seven semi-dwarf citrus trees along one fence. The front yard was then re-imagined with raised gardens, fountains, statuary, a dry creek bed, an herb garden, and more than 20 unique fruit trees. They then considered the backyard, with its pool taking up most of the usable space, and created a patio oasis with pergolas full of delicious fruiting vines which are helping to protect sensitive tropical fruit trees. They also planted special trees and shrubs ideal for cooking, surrounding a lovely patio with a fire table and small fountain. All this is on a standard 7500 square foot property. They love showing off their garden and hope their approach will inspire others with normal-size or smaller yards to follow the example and take the plunge, go for the gusto, throw caution to the winds, and GARDEN!

It's potluck time again. Please bring something for lunch which can feed 5 people.

EVENT
Date: Saturday, August 22, 10:30 am
Location: Sepulveda Garden Center
Event: How to Get "Free" plants (Propagation methods) by Deborah Oisboid

The best things in life are free – especially free plants! Learn how to increase the number of plants you already own (or have access to) by doing your own propagating.

Please bring something to share for our potluck table. However, there are new rules at Sepulveda Gardens and we are no longer allowed to use the stove or microwave oven, so please plan accordingly.

Save the date!
CALENDAR FOR L.A. CHAPTER 2026

September 26	Bill Brandt Garden Tour with Hands-On Demonstration of Proper Pruning Techniques
October 24	TBD
November 28	TBD
December 19	Holiday Party

TAKE A LOOK!

Have you seen our chapter website lately? It's been completely revamped, with a new, clean look and lots of great information.
www.crfg-la.org

You can find a copy of the "Cooking with Cactus" presentation here, with full color photos:
crfg-la.org/index.php/2026/05/05/cooking-with-cactus

LOOKING BACK

By Deborah Oisboid

May 23 – Cooking with Cactus

Our May meeting started with a bit of a scramble because of a mix-up in reserved dates for our meeting. Fortunately, we were allowed to use the kitchen, so we set up the presentation outside on the patio behind the meeting room. Also, fortunately, the crowd was just the right size for this venue.

Emily Diebold from the Los Angeles Cactus and Succulent Society (LACSS) was our guest speaker. She initially came to love plants because of her mother. As she discovered the huge and fascinating variety of succulents, she joined LACSS.

Emily challenged us to guess which cacti and succulents can be eaten. This was done by presenting different families/groupings and asking us to vote whether we thought its species were edible (thumbs-up), not edible (thumbs-down), or partially edible/unknown (thumbs pointing sideways).

Before starting the presentation, Emily cautioned us to be very careful of look-alike species, where one family could be poisonous while the other is perfectly edible. She told us she is not an expert, and we shouldn't just start eating random plants on her say-so.

We were advised to NEVER assume something is edible because it looks like something: make sure you KNOW what it is first! Also, before you start nibbling, make sure the plant is clean of pesticides. Sometimes it's not the plant which can make you sick! With some plants, you need to drain the sap before you can eat them. And, of course, watch out for spines!

First up was the cactus family. Most cacti are edible. Many species produce fruit, such as opuntia, hylocereus, dragon fruit, cereus, pilosocereus, mammillaria and, of course, nopales (prickly pears). Mammillaria is also known as "pin cushion cactus." The fruit tastes like strawberries. There's not really a lot to eat, but the flavor is delicious!

Opuntia stems are also edible: nopales. The young tender pads are the ones you eat; older pads are very tough.

(For our purposes, peyote is not considered "edible," it's other uses notwithstanding!)

What is the difference between a cactus and succulent? A succulent is a plant with fleshy water storage, usually in the stem or the leaves. Cacti are succulents but not all succulents are cacti!

The other families Emily showed us (try to guess if they are edible or not):

- Agaves – these are partially edible. See below.
- Aizoaceaa – this family includes ice plant, lithops, *carpobrotus edulis*, *Mesembryantemum crystallinum*, and *tetragonias tetragonioides* – mostly edible.
- Apocynaeceae – the dogbane family includes milkweed and oleander – most are NOT edible
- Apocynaceae – the family includes loroco and natal plum, mostly edible!
- Asphodelaceae - haworthia, aloe, gasteria, and bulbine; edibility varies. Some aloes are actually poisonous!
- Burseraceae – these are resinous succulents such as torchwood, frankincense, and myrrh – some are edible.
- "Cactus Adjacent" – this family includes *Talinum*, *Lewisia*, and *Portulacaria*, most of which are edible
- Crassulaceae – these include jade, sedum and dudleyea; some are edible and some are not.
- Cyphostemma – these plants are very short with thick, heavy trunks; some are edible but what we typically grow is poisonous, so watch out! The ones which grow the delicious-looking purple grapes are absolutely poisonous.

- *Dioscorea* – they grow half above and half below the ground. The caudex has nice shapes and the foliage is a vine. This family includes yams, which taste MUCH better than the decorative varieties.
- *Euphorbia* – No. Well, mostly no. Many people are allergic to their white latex sap. But there are more than 3000 species, and one has an edible part: *Euphorbia antisysphitlitica*, which is used in food glazes and cosmetics.
- *Sansevieria* – snake plant, aka "mother-in-law's tongue," is not edible.
- Yucca – Flowers and fruit are edible. Do not eat the root of "Yucca" with two C's, because it contains saponins (foamy soap). However there's another plant spelled differently ("Yuca") which is a variety of euphorbia with an edible root.

Emily told us that tequila is made from agave. There are many rules regarding which agave species you can use to make tequila. Mezcal can also be made from certain agaves.

Agave stores sugar in its roots to prepare for the only flower it grows. The stem is cut down just before it starts to flower. The leaves are removed, and the rounded stem is chopped off the roots. At this point it is called a piña ("pineapple"), and it kind of looks like one, too. If you slice a flower stem just as it starts, the water which comes out is called "agua miel" ("honey water"). Agave flowers are also edible!

In the *Aizoaceae* family, *Tetragonia tetragonioides* is also known as" New Zealand spinach," and it is definitely edible. Several CRFG members commented on its flavor. ("It just tastes like greens.")

Most of the plants in the presentation originated from Africa. But cactus, yucca, and agave all originated in the New World (the Americas). We learned there are no native cacti in Africa. *Rhypsalis* (aka "mistletoe cactus") may have been introduced to Madagascar by birds. They originated in South America, spread out to North America, and somehow got to Africa many millenia ago.

When people like something they spread it around. A good example is bananas. Onions are thought to have originated in the Americas and somehow, 10,000 years ago, fishermen stopped on the west coast and brought onions back to Europe. Before that, Europe only had "proto-onions." Bromeliads are exclusively New World plants. Any overseas bromeliads may have been brought over by a migratory bird. (One seed may have stuck to a bird's foot millions of years ago - think of that!)

In fact, a lot of plants have murky origins.

Our potluck was very special. Emily and Eli Cohen from the LACSS cooked up some amazing nopales tacos for us, with fried nopales, beans, rice, and cheese. They were served with our own homegrown foods including make-your-own-tacos, corn salad, gazpacho, key lime pie, and too many cakes and cookies to count! We all learned a lot and now have new appreciation for our drought-tolerant garden friends. Many thanks to Emily and Eli for their delicious presentations!

June 27 – Annual Humongous Plant Sale

Our annual plant sale was tremendously successful! We started extra-early in the morning, with all incoming donations entering from the foyer where the bathrooms are located. From there, everything was sorted, tagged, and then brought inside to an appropriate table. Although attendees could be inside by 9:30am for Charles Portney's wonderfully descriptive speech, they were not allowed to select anything nor put it aside -they had to wait to shop until the sale officially began at 10am.

Charles outdid himself this year. His incredible "Special Collection" of donated plants was impressive and quite varied. His amazingly informative description of every plant for sale taught us things we never knew before.

For instance, although daylilies are toxic to felines, did you know they are edible by humans? The flowers can be used like squash flowers: tossed in a salad or soup. Young shoots can be used as herbs. And the roots can substitute for water chestnuts. However, **know the difference**! Asiatic lilies and star lilies can be poisonous. Peace lilies and calla lilies will cause your mouth to swell.

And, according to flowersgeek.com, **all** parts of orange daylilies (*humerocallis fulva*) are considered poisonous.

This year we had several special guests. Charles Malki brought some of his favorite IV Organics products and sold them at a discount – and still provided a big donation to our scholarship fund!

David Bassani, sometimes known as "Ask Mr. B," had a special table set up to answer garden questions of all kinds. He educated people on how to care for their plants, what to expect as they grow, and other solutions.

Just outside the meeting room, L.A. Compost was available to talk about the differences between mulch and compost, and offer up to 5 gallons of finished compost to anyone who brought along their own container. L.A. Compost distributes their product at farmers' markets and at scheduled giveaway events. Their Sepulveda Garden facility is open on scheduled weekdays. (https://www.mobilize.us/lacompost/event/744546/)

The sale itself was wild! Hundreds of people attended and were very enthusiastic about the available plants. With multiple ways to pay for their purchase, and dedicated wagons to bring the plants to their vehicles, things went

fairly smoothly, although the initial line for purchasing went halfway around the room! After 1 hour, at least half of the plants were gone, and by noon, more than 90% had sold! Hopefully everyone found what they wanted.

Are you ready for the list of plants you could have bought? Here it is in alphabetical order:

African blue basil, agave, aloe vera, grafted apple trees, avocado, bananas, Barbados gooseberry vines, bauhinia tree seedlings, bananas (including "Becky's Mystery"), begonia flowers, blackberries, bush raspberries, cactus varieties, *callisia fragrans* (basket plant), canna (flower), cape gooseberry, cardoon, carrotwood tree, centaurea gymnocarpa (false Dusty Miller), chaste tree (vitex), che trees, cherimoya, cherry of the Rio Grande, comfrey, dragon fruit/pitahaya, elderberries, elephant ear, elm seedlings, epazote, eugenia trees, false cardamon, figs, gardenias, garlic chives, geraniums, glory bush/mini princess flower, goji berry tree, grape varieties, grass jelly vine, red hibiscus, roselle hibiscus, horseradish, hummingbird sage, ice cream bean (inga edulis), jackfruit seedling, jade, jalapeños, Jerusalem sage, kalanchoe varieties, "Tahitian bridal veil," lemon grass, lemon verbena (fresh plants), live oak seedling, longan seedlings, longevity spinach, loquats, milkweed (tropical), monstera, nopales/thornless cactus pear, olive seedlings, passionfruit, scented geraniums (pelargonium), pepino dulce (yellow and gold), peppers, pigeon peas, pineapple, pineapple sage, plum trees, Plumeria, pomegranate, pompom tree, privet bush, Queen's tears bromeliad, raisin tree seedlings, ribbon bush (muehlenbeckia platyclada or homalocladium platicladum), rose cactus, roses, rudbeckia, sage varieties (edible), salvia (flowers), shrimp flower, squash seedlings, stone fruit trees, strawberries, sugar cane, Texas sage (which isn't really a sage), tiger lilies, turmeric, waffle plant, yarrow, yellow winter jasmine, galangal (Thai ginger), and culinary ginger (*Zingibera*).

Doesn't that make you hungry? We also had dozens of books and scores of posters available. There were "papri-mild" paprika seeds, pints of dried lemon verbena and dried bay leaves, and someone donated a fantastic collection of propagation equipment.

Many, many thanks to those who donated plants (and books and equipment and seeds and dried leaves), and especially to those who donated their time to make this sale such a rousing success!

CLASSIFIED ADS

WANTED: Empty plant pots, especially gallon size, to be used for propagation. Please bring as many as you can to the next Sepulveda Garden Center events, so we can start preparing for next year's Humongous Plant Sale!