



Redwood Empire Chapter Newsletter

October 2006

Garden Tour at Carlo and Mary Bottini's

By Mike Lee



The Bottini Garden

Eighteen members showed up on Saturday, June 17 to tour the Bottini's garden. Many of us murmured enviously when Carlo mentioned finding an artesian well at 150' that irrigated all his plantings with warm water. The Bottini's garden is full of a mix of herbs, mature fruit trees, vines, and berries. Certainly the chance to see kiwi vines with trunks as big around as my waist was worth the visit alone. It covered a 20' apple tree and appeared to have hundreds of fruit ripening.

Carlo showed us his young paw paws, avocados, and hazel nut trees that hadn't yet produced. In amongst the many plantings were mature peaches, plums, apples and pears. As we walked along his well-mulched paths, and admired the trellised raspberries, I shuddered to think how much weeding and picking was involved in keeping the garden as clean and robust as it was.

An unexpected end of the tour was to find a table spread with fresh-baked cookies and cakes. Raffle prizes featured 2 flats of Bottini raspberries, bananas, cherimoya seedlings, pitayas, and miracle fruit seedlings. No one went home empty-handed.

Festival of Fruit 2006

By Phil Pieri

It's 6 AM Wednesday September 6th, this is the day we leave for San Louis Obispo. I leap out of bed. (Ouch wrong move). I have scheduled a 3 O'clock tour. I am hoping to get to the airport get the plane loaded and get in the air by 10, that would us to San Louis Obispo by noon. Well one thing led to another, and another, and another, and we finally got into the air by noon. Two hours later we landed

at S.L.O. and it was a mad dash to get our rent car, find a map and navigate to the 3 O'clock tour. We made it just in time. The tour was at the home of CRFG member Jack Swords in Nipomo, about 20 miles south of S.L.O. on Highway 101. Jack has one and a half acres of rare fruit trees including 47 producing macadamia nut trees, many varieties of citrus, cherimoya, sapote, banana. and many more too numerous to list.

After the tour it was back to SLO to find our motel and then of to the Wednesday evening reception at the home of Paul and Sandra Ogren to meet the festival hosts and early arrivals. Not to forget the wine and delicious food that was served, after that we were not inclined to go out for supper, but back to the motel for a good night's rest.

Thursday morning The Sands Motel provided a great continental breakfast, then off to our first tour of the day. South on Highway 101 again. It was a nursery called Speedling. They produce seedling transplant plugs for the commercial farming industry. They are high tech, and provide millions of seedlings virtually untouched by human hands.

The next tour was at the home of Leisa Rego high on a hill over looking Pismo Beach. A fairly small lot with many palm and fruit trees in every conceivable space.

The third tour was at the home of Robert and Carol Scott, Almost two and a half acres with over 200 fruit trees and a green house. The Scotts had lived there for thirty years and when they bought the property there was not one tree on the place.

The Thursday afternoon reception was at the Sands motel, for registration and door prizes given away. Another opportunity to visit with CRFG members from all over.

Friday were tours of the Cal Poly campus Ag. projects and plant conservatory.

Saturday the speaker /workshops were in session until afternoon when the plant sale started with many vendors on hand. Finally the closing reception. All in all an excellent Festival.

Sunday it was back in the air for an uneventful 1 hour and 40 minute flight back to Petaluma.

Bananas growing in Sebastopol?

You bet!

by Paul Apfel.

On Saturday, May 6th, a number of Redwood Chapter members enjoyed a tour of Vince Scholten's banana plant growing operation on Pleasant Hill Road in Sebastopol. After years of experimentation, Vince has a great deal of expertise in growing bananas both inside and outside the greenhouse, in what might be considered challenging weather for bananas.

Vince showed us his banana plantings within his commercial sized greenhouse. Apparently, the prior owner had placed a layer of rocks on the floor of the greenhouse. Rather than dig out this rock, Vince planted his bananas in mounds of mulch on top of this rock layer. This technique has worked well as a number of his 50 banana varieties have fruited. Bananas, it seems, do not require particularly deep soil in order to prosper.

And when bananas prosper they have babies, sending "pups" along their sides. Pup management is one of the major topics in banana growing. Some advocate separating off the pups immediately to concentrate the energy within the mother plant. Vince has found, however, that with at least one of his banana cultivars, it will only fruit for him after it has sent up a number of pups and those pups are left intact to grow alongside the mother plant.

Vince is raising his banana plants organically. This distinguishes him from most, if not all of the other growers of banana plants in the state. Eschewing chemical fertilizers, Vince uses only mulch, in particular, a product known as "Mango Mulch," as well as mulch teas. And that he gets great results doing things naturally.

Vince firmly believes that bananas can be grown and fruited outdoors in Sonoma county! He has considerable experience doing just this, and is very willing to divulge his secrets. An understanding of pup management, winter dormancy, and cutting down the mother plant if it does not set fruit by June, can apparently carry you to success.

Vince welcomes retail customers to his Nor Cal Growers facility on Saturdays and Sundays from 9- 5 PM. The facility is located at 2100 Pleasant Hill Road. To get there from downtown Sebastopol: go west on Bodega Avenue; left on Watertrough Road, then right on Pleasant Hill Road.

We are very fortunate to have someone so dedicated to experimenting with bananas here in the North Bay! Be sure to stop by. You may find yourself going bananas, or at the very least, growing bananas.

Growing Pitayas

by Mike Lee

Tourists arrive at Lake Atitlan, Guatemala to see the breathtaking scenery of volcanos, fog mists, clear waters and indigenous inhabitants with their brightly colored hand woven clothing. However, tourists typically don't realize Lake Atitlan is also ground zero for Central America's commercial pitaya production. While pitaya is now grown commercially in Asia, the tropical, climbing cactus' origin is in Central America.

Along the western shores of Lake Atitlan, large boulders crowd the beaches. Where there is any natural cavity or indentation in the rocks, loose soil is mounded and a pitaya stem planted. These "found" trellises support the plant above the ground. Kept moist by winter rains and

the drizzle of summer fog, no irrigation is utilized. The cacti which have few spines create a living blanket over the rocks. In this climate, where high temperatures are in the 80's and lows are in the 60's, the plants begin to bear in 2 years.

With warm weather, the giant night-blooming flower is pollinated and ripens its fruit in 30 days. A strikingly beautiful fruit, it has an orangy-red exterior with scale-like growths that have inspired the name of "dragon fruit" in Asia. Inside, the fruit is reminiscent of a giant kiwi, with white, pink, or purple sorbet-like pulp sprinkled with dark seeds. The fruit must be at peak ripeness to maximize its sweetness. Otherwise, it can be a bit insipid, lacking acidity as well.

My experience growing pitayas was limited to greenhouse cultivation in pots. While these will grow and fruit in the pots, moving these gangly plants and their trellises can be a headache. When one was outplanted last year with a grafted cherimoya tree, I wondered how soon after the first frost it would last. The cherimoya was covered under a frost blanket and seemed to do well until Feb, when temperatures dropped to 21 degrees. Come springtime, the cherimoya was dead above the graft, and the pitaya was budding out. So this year, I'll try and plant a row of pitayas out, each with its own 5 ft. post.



Red Pitaya

Apple Tasting on Oct.7

By Mike Lee

Our last scheduled event of the year will be Saturday, Oct. 7 at 1- 3PM at Kalia Kliban's house. This will be an apple tasting, so bring anything that you may have on hand. If some apples are ripe in time for this put 2 or 3 of each variety aside in the frig. If you've got some other fruit (i.e. pears) please bring those to try as well.

Directions to Kalia's house:

From Marin County and points south:

As you come up 101, pass through Petaluma, go over the hill then take the 116 WEST exit (Rohnert Park/Sebastopol). You passed 116 E ages ago, which is fine. You didn't want to go there anyway. At the bottom of the exit ramp, turn left onto 116 (toward Sebastopol). In about 6 ½ miles (and this

Coming Events

Oct. 7 Saturday 1-3:00 PM
Apple tasting at Kalia Kliban
7272 Elphick Sebastopol

Saturday, Jan 27, 2007

Winter Scion Exchange
Veterans Memorial Building
282 High St. Sebastopol

is really approximate) watch for a traffic light at the intersection of Bloomfield Road and 116. Don't turn, stay on 116, but start paying closer attention to what you pass, which will be Sparkes Road (on the left) and the Sequoia mini-mart (also on the left). Around then, the road will curve right, and just where it starts to curve back left is the left turn onto Elphick Road, which you want to take. If you pass the Holiday Inn on the right, you've gone a tiny bit too far.

Once on Elphick turn left after a block to stay on Elphick (if you go straight you'll be on Witter), then pass Saraview Lane on the right and take the very next driveway on the right, which is marked with 6 green address placards (we're #7272 Elphick). Drive slowly since there are cats who like to sleep in the road. We're on the left almost at the end, and you'll see our green, barn-shaped studio building in the driveway. Park anywhere that doesn't block the road. The phone number here is 707-829-3478.

From Santa Rosa and points north:

Get yourself to downtown Sebastopol, and head south on 116. In a little under a mile, you'll see the Holiday Inn (large red pseudo-Craftsman building on your left). Very shortly after that, turn right onto Elphick Road after the chainlink fence around the Enmanji Temple parking lot, and follow the directions in the second paragraph above.

Summer Scion Exchange at Phil Pieri's

by Mike Lee

About 15 of our chapter members met at Phil's, on Saturday, August 12, where we enjoyed his great greenhouse made exclusively out of recycled sliding glass doors and skylights. We marveled over the lush jungle growing there which included bananas, guavas, starfruit, atemoya, ginger, passion fruit, pitaya, babaco, and many others.

Members had an opportunity to taste a nice

selection of plums, particularly European plums. Scions that were available included many plums (Asian and European), peaches, apricots, Surinam cherry, avocado, and babaco. Banana pups of 6 varieties were also available

Thanks to Phil and Marilee for hosting a wonderful afternoon!

New Initiatives

by Mike Lee

At Phil's house, members unanimously passed some new proposals.

We'd grant reimbursements for registration at the Festival of Fruit at San Luis Obispo this September. Members on their return would need to write an article about their visit for our chapter newsletter.

- 1 → We would buy a utility wagon to help haul trees.
- 2 → We would buy 2 EZ-UPS for chapter events
- 3 → We would start a chapter lending library of books and videos. \$500.

Plant Propagation

by David Ulmer

Dan Lassanski, who has been teaching plant propagation for 30+ years at Cal Poly, taught an excellent class at the Festival of Fruit. Here are some pearls from his class, along with a few observations from my own experience.

Plant reproduction methods can be divided into two main categories

- 1) Sexual = seeds
- 2) Asexual = any other part of plant.

Examples: cuttings (stem, leafbud, and leaf), division, air layering, ground layering, budding and grafting, root-cuttings, and micropropagation.

Dan discussed rooting and division. The following are a few points he made about rooting.

Stem cuttings for rooting should be 2"-4" long, and pencil thickness or less. Terminal cuttings usually do best.

Cut stems to be rooted a quarter inch below the bud. Ideally, you should have 2 buds above and 2 buds below rooting medium. Remove any leaves that would be buried. →

READERS - stretch your writing skills and share your hard-won knowledge with the rest of us for the next Newsletter. Send articles or brief squibs to Mike Lee: mlee@sonic.net or Michael Kurland: mkurland@contops.org

Use rooting hormone on the basal end. If leaves are large, remove 1/2 of the leaf to reduce transpiration.

For some fruit crops, semi-hardwood cuttings (a few weeks after new flush of growth) probably are best. Blueberries are often propagated this way.

Most of our rootable fruit varieties are done as dormant hardwood cuttings. These include Grape, Pomegranate, Kiwi, Eleagnus (autumn olive, goumi), Fig, Currant, and Gooseberry. Many of the rootstocks can be rooted also.

As an addendum to Dan's lecture, here are a few things that have helped me root hardwood cuttings:

1. Provide bottom heat. Figs and Kiwis seem to particularly like heat at the root zone.
2. If the plants start pushing leaves too soon (before roots form), spray them with an anti-transpirant such as Cloud Cover that you can buy at Harmony Farm Supply. Spray every few days until you know that roots have formed. Kiwis, in particular, seem to fool me into thinking they have rooted, often growing several inches and then dying for lack of roots.
3. Use a light, well draining rooting mixture. I use one of the commercial potting soil mixes diluted 1/2 with perlite. Too much peat or vermiculite tends to stay too moist.

If you have questions, give me a call at 707 824 1650



Visit to NorCal Growers

S t a f f

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time flies like an arrow - fruit flies like a banana

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