

# The Leaflett

California Rare Fruit Growers - Central Coast Chapter  
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## 2004--The Year of the Berry

### JABOTICABA

*Myrciaria species*

*Myrtaceae*



Pet Daniels got me interested in this berry when she talked about it as being one of the “rarest fruits” in her garden. In size, shape, and taste, it closely resembles a Concord grape, but it grows on a small tree, not a vine. Instead of clusters, the berries sprout out individually on the tree trunk! It is definitely a fruit you won’t see growing everywhere and is something you might want to try for yourself, if for no other reason than it makes a wonderful conversation piece!

Jaboticaba is native to South America, particularly Brazil, where it is a popular fruit for eating out-of-hand. In Brazil jaboticabas grow from sea-level to elevations of more than 3,000 ft., its range of growth seeming limited only by frost sensitivity. It was introduced to California (Santa Barbara) in 1904. It has been grown as far north as San Francisco Bay and makes an excellent container plant since, around here, it usually only reaches a height of about 10 – 15 feet. (In Brazil, some of the species reach 40’ in frost-free climates.)

Like most berries, jaboticaba prefers rich, deep soil with a pH of 5.5 to 6.5. It is not well adapted to alkaline soils, but it **may** be grown successfully if that is all you have to work with **and** if you add lots of mulch and apply nutrient sprays containing iron. However, the tree will not tolerate salty or poorly drained soil. It is a slow grower, a problem that can be somewhat diminished by feeding it with half-strength fertilizer on a monthly basis. They like full sun, too. Frost protection is necessary when temperatures are dropping into the 27-29° F. range. Because they aren’t huge trees, draping them with plastic during particularly cold weather is the simplest way to prevent frost damage.

Propagating a jaboticaba is quite easy. Planted in a good medium, seeds sprout in a month or less and usually come quite true to their parent plant. **UNFORTUNATELY**, it will take anywhere from 8-15 years for this seedling to produce fruit! Most of us don't have that kind of patience. We want our fruit and we want it now! Selected strains can be reproduced by inarching (approach grafting) or air-layering. Budding is not very successful because of the thinness of the bark and the hardness of the wood. Veneer or side grafts seem to be the best grafting technique. A grafted plant will fruit considerably earlier than a seedling—usually within three years. They seem to fruit better when planted in groups, too, although single specimens will produce berries. Since they fruit on the interior branches, jaboticabas even make good small hedges. (Photo on right is of a jaboticaba in bloom. The flowers are a lovely, pale green.)



Rust can be a problem and needs to be treated to prevent too much leaf drop. Of course, birds are going to love your fruit, but gophers don't seem very attracted to the jaboticaba roots, so that has to be a plus for some of us! Again, because the tree isn't too big, a net thrown over it should be sufficient protection from birds or marauding raccoons or opossums.

Most California fruits are about 1" in diameter and colored dark purple to almost black when mature. Jaboticaba fruits are ready to harvest when they have developed a full color and are somewhat soft--like a ripe grape. They are easily peeled by squeezing the fruit between the thumb and forefinger. The peeled fruits are good for making jelly, or even wine. The skin is high in tannin and should not be consumed in large quantities since tannin has no nutrient value and is even considered a carcinogenic if intake is frequent and over a long period of time.

In Brazil, these are very popular berries—mostly to eat fresh--and they have the potential for a marketable crop in California. Slow fruiting of plants and the need for frost protection are the two largest drawbacks for commercialization. Some people swallow the seeds with the pulp, but, like the Concord grape, the pulp tastes better if you spit the seeds out first. Use them in any recipe as a Concord grape substitute.

## July Meeting

(Thanks to Rhonda Underwood, our chapter secretary, for the following report on the meeting held July 10, 2004 at the Bear Creek Ranch in Los Osos.)

The meeting was brought to order at 2 PM by Roger Eberhardt. First time attendees were introduced, and then minutes from previous meeting were read. Dick Pottratz gave the treasurer's report: the bills are paid and we have a little over \$5,000 in the bank.

Joe Sabol discussed future meetings, but particularly the next meeting which will be held at Hearst Castle. The meeting is by reservation only, so those planning to attend should be sure to add name(s) to the signup sheet. There is a minimum donation of \$10 per person, and checks should be made out to Friends of Hearst Castle/CRFG and given to Dick Pottratz, who will write out one big check for the donation from our chapter. The donations are tax deductible and will go toward restoration of the gardens at Hearst Castle.

Roger mentioned the CRFG State Festival of Fruit which was held June 18 through 20 in Pomona. Local CRFG chapter members Robert and Carol Scott attended this event. They both gave a brief report on activities and seminars they attended during the festival.

Pet Daniels gave the Community Orchard report. She discussed the chores that need to be done: chips need to be spread in the orchard, and new labels need to be made for the trees. Also she asked that when members sample the fruit, to make a note on the paperwork in the kiosk with name, date, name of fruit and comments about the fruit.

New business: the Scotts made a recommendation for use of some of the chapter's funds. They'd



like to donate money to a scholarship fund for local needy college students. This proposal needs to be investigated and formalized, then will be taken up at a future board meeting. Lark Carter was nominated to put together a proposal for the scholarships to present to the board members.

Chuck Atlee then came forward and introduced our host, John Swift, and presented him with the CRFG hat. (See photo on left.) Chuck was pleased to do the introduction, as John was a previous student of his at Cal Poly. John gave a brief overview of the ranch history, the history of his fruit growing at the ranch, experimentation with varieties of rare fruits, and his move toward organic farming. Some of the

fruits he grows include: African Horned Melon (Kiwano), Feijoa, Persimmons, Passion Fruit, Pepino Melons, Babaco, and Cherimoyas. John then introduced Will Stagg, who manages the ranch and is working on the transition to organic farming. He described his methods of plant fertilizing which includes compost and foliar fertilizing. John and Will fielded a lengthy Q & A session from the group about everything from animal pests to composition of fertilizer. The lecture adjourned at 3:10 PM to the garden tour.

### Plants That Have Made History!

There probably aren't many of you who haven't heard of "the mutiny on the *Bounty*," but how many of you know that Captain Bligh's intention to get 1015 breadfruit trees from Tahiti to Jamaica was the beginning of the trouble? It's true! Breadfruit caused the mutiny!

After extreme hardship rounding Cape Horn, The *Bounty*, with Captain William Bligh in command, reached Tahiti on October 26, 1788, ten months after leaving England. The crew was in paradise: warm seas, warm weather, lots of food, and many beautiful (and scantily-clothed) women. The crewmembers, while on Tahiti, had little to do except enjoy themselves and it is said Bligh was **too** lenient with them, letting them do just about whatever they pleased.

However, nice as it was, they couldn't stay in "paradise" forever. Bligh still had a ship to work and a cargo to take from one port to another. With 1015 breadfruit trees on board, the *Bounty* left Tahiti on April 6, 1789. Prior to setting sail, some men tried to desert; it had taken ten months to get to Tahiti, it could be months to get to the Caribbean. Many of the crew did not want to face the months of deprivation for breadfruit trees! Fletcher Christian made plans to build a raft and escape. It is said Bligh became irrational when he learned this.

The mutiny took place in the early hours of April 28, 1789. It was not a majority decision. There were 43 crewmembers, (originally there had been 45, but one had died on the way to Tahiti and one had died in Tahiti). Thirty of the crew wished to go with Bligh in the launch, but only 19 of them could fit on

the 23-foot boat. John Samuel saved Bligh's journals, the *Bounty's* log, and a few other papers and got them aboard the launch. Bligh was given a quadrant, a compass, and food and water for only five days.

Using the quadrant and compass, William Bligh navigated the South Pacific, one of the greatest feats of seamanship ever. He only lost one man, Jonathan Norton, who gave his life so the rest could escape from hostile islanders. By June 17, 1789, Bligh had navigated 3700 miles of ocean and brought the launch into the port at Timor. Bligh and his crew caught a boat to Batavia (Jakarta, Indonesia) and there received passage back to England.

## CRFG/Cal Poly Orchard Update

Go and eat! The fruit is ripening and it is wonderful! Please be sure to make comments on the date of your visit, the type of fruit you tried, and your opinion of it! There is a sheet just for that information on the kiosk inside the fence.

Pet and Marv Daniels have organized many Sunday morning work parties. This orchard belongs to all of us—don't let them be the only ones doing the maintenance chores! If Sunday morning isn't a convenient time for you to help out, there is Saturday all day or Sunday afternoon to choose from, too. Parking is free at Cal Poly on Saturday and Sunday—no permit needed!

## Announcements

**Welcome New Members in July:** John & Kit Long.

**Web Site is Back:** After all the data on our web site was lost, Dr. Art DeKleine, our versatile co-chair, has managed to get it back up and running. He took the time between his retirement activities at Cal Poly and his extended summer travels to make sure we have a viable site. Thanks, Art! We are still at: <http://kcbx.net/~crfgslo/index.htm>

**Join the State Association:** Many of our chapter members are also members of the State association and those who aren't should consider joining. With state membership you receive a wonderful color magazine, *The Fruit Gardener*, filled with great articles on fruit growing, news, chapter activities and contacts. Yearly dues are **\$30**. Applications are available from **Joe Sabol**.

**Local Chapter Fees:** Are your dues current? A mere pittance of **\$6** will buy you all the wonderful benefits of our local **CRFG** for a year! Or, for **\$25** you will get **five** years of membership and save **\$5!** Where else can you have so much fun or learn so many interesting things for that price? Send your check to **CRFG Treasurer**, 2430 Leona Avenue, SLO, CA 93401.

## Calendar of Meetings - 2004

**August 14: Hearst Castle State Museum Gardens, San Simeon.** It is official—we will be touring the Hearst Castle gardens! The first bus will pull out of the Hearst Castle Visitor Center for the gardens at 1:30 p.m. sharp and the second will leave at 1:40 p.m. We will have a very brief "meeting" at the Visitors' Center at 1:00 p.m. to meet our hosts and hear the Friends of Hearst Castle "pitch". The buses are full! Although this tour is being offered to us FREE, we are asking for a minimum \$10 per person donation (a great bargain since the tour usually costs \$24/person) and our chapter will be adding another \$500 to that amount so that we can significantly contribute to the restoration of the gardens. Since this is a "free tour", the donation we make is tax-deductible. Please make out your checks out to CRFG for at least \$10 per person. Our Treasurer, Dick Pottratz, will then write one **big** check to the "Friends of Hearst Castle". (Dick will be delighted to have so many checks to deposit!) The Castle is located on **Highway 1 at San Simeon, just north of Cambria. No refreshments or chairs are needed for this event, but carpool if you can.**

**September 4: Dave Wilson Fruit Tasting Event at Cal Poly.** Details will follow. Mark your calendars now. You won't want to miss this opportunity!

**September 11: J B Farms, Paso Robles:** This will be our regular monthly meeting held at the farm of Janet and Bob Tullock in Paso Robles. The Tullocks grow a variety of fruit there, and Bob is a knowledgeable farmer. Take the drive north to **5335 Monterey Road in Paso Robles.** (More details to follow.)

**October 23: Paul Rys' Pumpkin Patch.** Paul is a champion pumpkin grower--he won the Half Moon Bay Pumpkin contest last year for "Most Beautiful." His winner weighed over 500 lbs, but it was the color, not the size that won him his prize! Big pumpkins seem to lose color, but Paul has been working on breeding the color back into the giants. Notice this meeting is in late October--not on our usual second-Saturday-of-the-month. We will need to do some heavy "publicity" on the date change, but it'll be a fun and informative time. Mark your calendars now! Call him regarding pumpkin seeds at **544-2825.**

**November 13: Rim Rock Vineyard, Nipomo:** This micro vineyard of syrah grapes is owned by Bernie and Lennette Horton and managed by Greg Phelan and his brother, Robert. Greg, a Cal Poly graduate with a Master's in viticulture, will present an informative talk on growing grapes for fun and profit! (We'll also be sampling some of Rim Rock's 2002 vintage Syrah!) The location is at 265 Rim Rock Road in Nipomo.

**December 11: Annual Potluck at the PG&E Visitor's Center**

**Note:** If you are receiving this newsletter electronically and wish to be taken off the mailing list, please inform me at [handynana@hortons.us](mailto:handynana@hortons.us) or you may reach me by phone at **474-6501**. Lennette Horton, Newsletter Editor