

The Leaflett

California Rare Fruit Growers - Central Coast Chapter

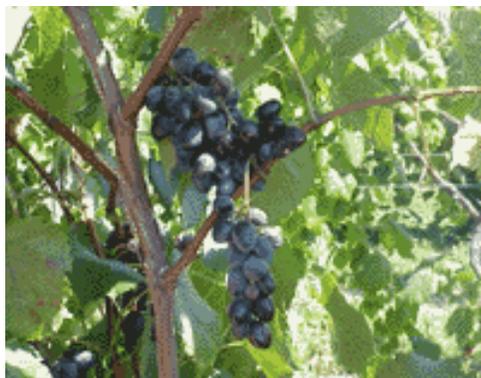
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2004--The Year of the Berry

Grapes

Vitaceae



Grapes are the most popular **berry** and the most widely planted fruit crop in the world, covering an area of approximately 10 million hectares! The genus *Vitaceae* is divided into two subgenera: the *Euvites*, including the greater number of species; and the *Muscadinioe*, with only three species. There are in all between forty and fifty species of true grape-vines, one native to Europe, twelve to Asia, and thirty-five to North America. Grapes have a much longer history than that of man. The earliest representative yet discovered is the fossil species *V. sezonnensis*, which flourished in the subtropical forests of what is now France during the Lower Eocene epoch.

Wild grapes, hanging down in clusters of great beauty, sweeter and juicier than most fruits, would have certainly caught the attention of those ancient hunter/gatherers very early in areas where the vines could grow--a welcome side dish to eat with woolly mammoth and wild boar! After pottery was invented, someone who had gathered too many grapes to eat immediately probably decided to store the extras in a pottery vessel, only to return to it a few days later and discover the grapes had turned liquid. Not wanting to waste anything, that early gatherer drank the liquid (which would have fermented because of yeasts present in the bloom on the skins) and learned about the mind and body altering effects of wine!

However it happened, once humans learned about wine, grapes didn't remain wild for very long. Archaeologists say that grapes were one of the earliest cultivated fruits on Earth. The grape that became known as *vitis vinifera* originated in the Black Sea region and spread rapidly southward to the Middle East. According to the best estimates, grapes were being cultivated in Mesopotamia as early as 6,000 BC. From there, the vinifera grape spread eastward to Phoenicia and Egypt. By 2,000 BC, Phoenician sailors were ferrying grapevines across the Mediterranean Sea to Greece and the world beyond. The earliest reference to a vineyard in literature is in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* which was written about the eighteenth century BC, but which refers to a much earlier time. The Old Testament of the Bible tells us that Noah planted a vineyard and made wine.

Texts from tombs in ancient Egypt prove that wine was in use there around 2700 to 2500 BC. Priests and royalty were using wine, while beer was drunk by the workers. The Egyptians developed the first arbors and pruning methods. Archeological excavations have uncovered many sites with sunken jars, so the effects of temperature on stored wine were probably known. However, the ancient Greeks were the first civilization to make a serious practice of grape growing and winemaking. The Greeks

even had a god of the vine – Dionysus (later Bacchus). Early efforts to make a potable beverage out of grapes were mixed. With no refrigeration, uncontrolled fermentation, and lack of proper sanitation, ancient Greek wines were, at best, an acquired taste and were often flavored with honey or other ingredients to make them palatable.

The Romans began to refine the art of grape-growing and processing. They introduced pruning by knife, as well as filtering and proper storage. The Romans also understood how much climate, soil, and pruning style could affect grape flavor and production. (The world's oldest known bottle of wine was Roman, unearthed in 1867 during an excavation for building a house in a vineyard near the town of Speyer, Germany, and was inside one of two Roman stone sarcophaguses that were dug up. The bottle dates from approximately 325 AD.) However, the art of grape-growing declined along with Roman civilization after 400 AD. Only the Church kept the practice alive through Medieval times, particularly the Benedictine and Cistercian abbeys of France and Germany. Their wines led to a gradual resurgence in viticulture.

As knowledge of plant biology, grafting, and hybridization expanded over time, so did the varieties of grapes and their uses. Soon there were "table" grapes grown especially for eating, "dessert" grapes, raisin grapes, and, of course, the many varieties of wine grapes, from Chardonnay to Zinfandel.

V. vinifera was brought by the Spaniards to Mexico in the early 1500's. California's reputation as a world wine producer commenced when the Catholic friars began building missions north of Mexico in the early 1700's. Father Junipero Serra, first Father-Presidente of the Alta California Mission Chain, founded Mission San Luis Obispo de Tolosa on September 1, 1772 and, although the mission was very poor, it is known that a vineyard was established soon after the mission's start.

Father Serra also brought grapevine cuttings from Mexico to what is now Santa Barbara County in 1782 to be planted in the fertile land near Sycamore Creek (currently the Milpas district) although Mission Santa Barbara itself wasn't founded until December 4, 1786. The largest mission vineyard, about 25 acres, was located in the San Jose Creek area, and an adobe winery, built nearby in 1804, is now Goleta's oldest landmark. In 1884, Justinian Caire imported grape slips from France and planted a 150-acre vineyard on Santa Cruz Island. His prize-winning wines were shipped to San Francisco for bottling. A grapevine planted in 1842 on a farm in Carpinteria grew to monstrous proportions. In fifty years, it had a trunk measuring nine feet around, an arbor covering two acres and an annual yield of ten tons of grapes!

Our November chapter meeting was held at Rim Rock Vineyard in Nipomo, which is owned by Bernie and Lennette Horton, was all about growing wine grapes. Viticulturist, **Greg Phelan** (in the photo at the right), who manages Rim Rock Vineyard, explained the process to the 50-60 of those of us in attendance.

In commercial vineyards, vines are usually started in spring from year-old rooted or grafted cuttings. (Rim Rock's vines are mainly Syrah grafted onto established Chardonnay rootstock.) Roots are trimmed to 3 to 4 inches and vines are planted 8 to 10 feet apart. All the shoots except the strongest one on the vine are later pruned; the remaining shoot is cut back to two or three buds. This process is repeated in the spring of the following two years. The resulting plant develops a strong main stem, resembling a small tree trunk, before it is allowed to bear fruit. Such strong stems are able to stand erect without support. During the



expansion of the main stem, the vine is loosely tied to an upright support 6 feet tall or higher. After the fruit-producing stage is reached, the vines are pruned to reduce the number of buds. Shoots that develop from the remaining buds are more prolific and bear grapes of high quality.

Dormant period begins in autumn in temperate regions when the vine sheds its leaves. In the spring, when the mean daily temperature reaches about 50 degrees F, the buds begin to swell and green shoots emerge from them. This is known as “bud break”. Blooming occurs around 8 weeks after bud break and rapid shoot growth usually begins to slow down. The process of flower initiation for the following year’s crop begins before bloom and the development continues until near harvest time. Several days after the bloom period, pistons and impotent berries--often 50 to 60 percent or more--shatter from the cluster. The green stage of berry growth lasts from the setting of the berries up to veraison--the time the berries begin to color and soften and the ripening stage begins. As ripening progresses, the color becomes more intense, the amount of sugar increases, and acidity decreases. Even a few weeks before harvest, selective cluster dropping may be needed so that the vines can support higher sugar content in the remaining berries.

For a plant that has survived millions of years on its own, grapes take a surprising amount of work to grow! Soil amending and pest control are important and exacting processes that greatly affect the quality of a crop. Treatment of fungus is particularly vital in our coastal climate. There are also



serious threats to vineyards from entomological pests such as the glassy winged sharpshooter, a ravenous insect who is spreading grape-killing Pierce's Disease; the grape phylloxera, *Daktulosphaira vitifoliae*, a tiny insect that forms galls on leaves and roots of grapevines; and the newest threat, the vine Mealybug. Good old gophers and ground squirrels can also devastate plantings, not to mention deer.

With all the problems involved with growing wine grapes (not to mention others with table grapes or raisin grapes) why would anyone subject themselves to the task? If you ask Greg Phelan, he'll just grin and shake his head. Perhaps there is no answer to that question other than to try a glass of wine—there is sure to be one out there that will please you and make you realize that this “nectar of the gods” is worth the effort! (Check out the photo of our “serious” wine tasters at the November meeting!)

November Meeting

The November meeting was held in Nipomo at Rim Rock Vineyards. Fifty to sixty members and guests met on a beautiful sunny afternoon to enjoy refreshments (Marv Daniels, practicing for his retirement, made some great chocolate chip cookies!), conversation, and education! The meeting was called to order by Art DeKleine, our co-chair, who gave us the good news that he has our chapter website up and running again. He also talked about the December Potluck Meeting and some of our next few meetings. Dick Pottratz gave the treasurer’s report: the bills are paid and we have nearly \$5,000 in the bank.

Member Norm Beard of Goleta brought a most unusual fruit to share with us—known as the dragon fruit, it is the seed pod of a cactus, *Hylocereus undatus*. Also known as Pitahaya or Strawberry Pear, this fruit grows on a vining cactus with fleshy stems reaching from a few inches up to 20 feet long (in mature plants). The plant may trail over the ground or climb onto trees using aerial roots. The flowers

of this species bloom only at night and only for one night. They are thought to be natives of Southern Mexico and Central America. The flesh is sweet and delicious (or so I heard!) and best eaten out of hand, but it can also be used to flavor drinks or pastries. Sometimes the unopened but nearly mature flower buds are cooked and served as vegetables. Propagation is by seed or cuttings and I'm sure Norm, who is most generous with his abundant fruit, would be willing to share his knowledge of growing this cactus and maybe even provide some seeds or a cutting. (You can also order seeds from: Trade Winds Fruit, P.O. Box 232693, Encinitas, CA 92023).



Chuck Atlee gave a brief report on his recent trip to Costa Rica where he was excited to see the development of a new strain of guava, normally about three inches long, that is nearly eight inches long! The first commercial crop there is now ready for harvest. (Learn more about Chuck in the "Meet Your Board Member" column this month.)

Art DeKleine gave hosts Bernie and Lennette Horton and speaker, Greg Phelan, their special CRFG hats and then turned the meeting over to Bernie Horton, who introduced Greg, a sixth generation California farmer. Greg gave an in-depth report on growing wine grapes (see the above article for more details). After speaking and taking questions, Greg got to the best part of the meeting—pouring the wine!

Seasons Greetings—The della Robbia Wreath

As a fruit grower, what could be more fitting than for your holiday visitors to be greeted at your front door by a fresh wreath featuring the bounty of your orchard? This particular style of wreath is called "della Robbia", named in honor of a fifteenth-century Italian sculptor, Luca della Robbia, who, along with his progeny, sculpted beautiful fruit and foliage pottery swags with a distinctive glaze.



The linking of fruited della Robbia wreaths with Christmas and front doors seems to have started during the early years of this century in America's wealthier homes. To judge by the home and garden decorating magazines of the day, Christmas greenery of any sort on doorways was rare. Only the toney publications, loaded with advertisements for grand pianos, Packards, sterling silver tea services, and seven-week cruises, show photographs of homes with holiday trimmings--and even these are few and far between. It was left to Colonial Williamsburg to popularize this sort of decoration with the country's expanding and prosperous postwar middle class. (The June, 1932 *Sunset* magazine has a great article on making a della Robbia wreath using a base of lemon leaves! If you are a *Sunset* subscriber, access it online.)

When Colonial Williamsburg first decorated for Christmas in 1936, the greenery was confined to a few plain wreaths and some running cedar to hang about the Governor's Palace and the Raleigh Tavern. Mrs. Louise Fisher placed in charge of flowers and Christmas decorations drove to the Library of Congress where she turned up English and American pictorial examples from the period to use as guides. By 1939 her "della Robbia" wreaths were attracting considerable comment and the "Williamsburg Christmas look" was launched.

Never mind that no one in the eighteenth century would have been caught dead with real fruit tacked to his/her front door! Anyone hanging fresh fruit outdoors in the middle of winter to rot or be devoured

by squirrels would have been thought, at best, highly eccentric by the neighbors. Never-the-less, the practice that was adopted by Colonial Williamsburg in the early years of the restoration spread across the country by means of continual publicity in decorating magazines. So, maybe the “tradition” isn’t that old, but join the fun. Take some of your extra “rare” fruit, add some evergreens or citrus leaves, and put your own, unique, seasonal greeting on your front door!

Meet Your Board Member

Chuck Atlee



Chuck Atlee, one of our board members, and a past co-chair of our chapter, is a man “outstanding” in his field! On meeting Chuck, the first thing you will notice is that he is tall. “I used to be 6’7”, but now I’m only 6’4”, Chuck says. “When I retired, I settled down.” This brings us to the second thing you will learn about him and that is that he loves puns! (He says his wife limits him to two puns a day if she can catch him!)

Growing up in a small town in Pennsylvania, Chuck didn’t have any real experience with farming until he was eleven—and went to work on a nearby farm. He found he loved it and wanted to make agriculture a career. He went to Penn State where he met his future wife, Sue, who had also grown up in a small town in Pennsylvania. Sue was a couple of grades behind Chuck in school, so after he graduated, he signed up for a UNESCO project in Mexico. He hoped that there he would learn Spanish and absolve himself for failing that class in college! He worked several years in Mexico for UNESCO and Sue followed him there after her graduation. They were engaged in Mexico then went back to Bird-in-Hand, Pennsylvania to be married. They headed to California for their honeymoon.

It was two years later when Sue mentioned that nobody they knew had ever left Pennsylvania and wasn’t it time they returned? With his typical wit Chuck said, “Well, we’ll go back when the honeymoon is over.” That was 52 years ago—and the honeymoon still isn’t over for the Atlees, even though they have raised two children and have grandchildren. Their daughter is a veterinarian dermatologist in Raleigh, NC and their son lives at Mammoth Lakes, CA where he owned a hot air balloon business for 15 years. (“He had to get out of that business,” says Chuck. “You know, it has so many ups and downs, and those balloon payments will kill you!”)

Chuck did his graduate work at UC Davis and then worked for 10 years as a farm advisor in Santa Cruz. Tiring of that, in 1965, he took a position with the Guatemalan government as a vegetable advisor-- where his principle job was to introduce new farming techniques and crops. He is proud of his accomplishments during his time in Guatemala, bringing many new crops under cultivation, such as sugar peas, strawberries, artichokes, and brussel sprouts. He and a friend started their own small farm, growing cardamom and allspice, as well as macadamia nuts, avocados, and citrus trees. They were successful, but the political climate was becoming more and more unbearable and some of the tribesmen Chuck worked with were killed. Earlier, Chuck had met people from Cal Poly who were heading some other agricultural programs in the area and, when the then Cal Poly president visited and offered Chuck a teaching position in San Luis Obispo, Chuck decided it was time for a change.

The Atlees moved to San Luis Obispo 1969 and Chuck taught at Cal Poly, but he returned to Guatemala every summer until 1980 when the political situation got so bad, he felt he couldn't go back. In 1990, after his retirement from Cal Poly, Chuck and Sue went to Costa Rica where they were the first faculty members of Earth College—they lived in the girl's dorm while the campus was being finished. Several years later they tried to "re-retire" but soon found themselves traveling around the world after Chuck became a member of the Volunteers in Overseas Cooperative Assistance (VOCA) another organization that helps farmers in underdeveloped countries around the world. Together they went to Thailand, Southern Sumatra, and Indonesia. Chuck went on VOCA missions to Ecuador, Bolivia, Panama, and other Central American countries.

While agriculture may seem a rather innocuous occupation, the Atlees have been near the center of many frightening situations. One of their assignments with VOCA was in Burundi. Burundi is one of Africa's most densely populated nations, but tribal warfare has ravaged the country for decades, leaving the fertile land mostly unused. Chuck and Sue were there in June of 1993 when tribal rivalry escalated into a bloody power struggle following the Burundian presidential elections. They were confined to their hotel for over a week until they were able to leave the country.

One of his best assignments ever, Chuck says, was when the International Executive Service Corp asked him to go to Budapest, Hungary where he taught at an agricultural college there. He set up a teacher exchange program and several Hungarian teachers have now come to Cal Poly—one of them even marrying a Cal Poly professor and remaining here!

Since he was "retired", Chuck helped organize our local CRFG chapter over ten years ago. He and Laura Lopez served as co-chairs for three years and he currently serves on the board. In his spare time, he and Sue garden. Right now they are developing a flower garden for Sue on part of the acre and a half of land they own—land whose earth the neighbor calls "60 second soil." Chuck says that means you have 60 seconds to work the soil between it being too wet and too dry!

Oh, and just so they don't get lazy, they joined a bicycle club and are part of the senior division, known as the SLO Pokes—they only do "easy" rides of 25-30 miles with not too many hills!

Announcements

Web Site is Back: After all the data on our web site was lost, Dr. Art DeKleine, our versatile co-chair, has finally managed to get it back up and running. This has been a tremendous job and now he has promises of help with maintaining it from John and Choung Long. Thanks! Check the site at: www.crfg-central.org

Join the Parent Organization: Many of our chapter members are also members of the Parent association and those who aren't should consider joining. With parent organization membership you receive a wonderful color magazine, *The Fruit Gardener*, filled with great articles on fruit growing, news, chapter activities and contacts. Dues are **\$30 annually** or **3 years for \$87** as of January 2004. Applications are available from **Joe Sabol**.

Local Chapter Newsletter Fees: Is your newsletter fee current? **We don't send out reminders, so please check the list below to see if you need to update in January.** As our treasurer, Dick Pottratz explained, he puts everyone on an annual fee due basis beginning in January—so some new members get more than a year and some less, depending on when they signed up. A mere pittance of **\$6** will buy you all the monthly newsletters from our chapter for a full year! Or, for **\$25** you will get the newsletter from our chapter for **five** years and save **\$5!** Where else can you get so much information for so little money? Send your check to **CRFG Treasurer**, 2430 Leona Avenue, SLO, CA 93401. **Fees coming due in January** for the following: Sandy Ahearn, Dennis Anctil, Gary

Aubuchon, Debbie Bailey, Alan & Liane Barta, Owen & Patricia Baynham, Don & Judy Beach, Paul Berdoulay, Michael Blake, David Blakely, Ronald Blakey, Glenn Britton, Dr. Howard & Fay Brown, Tom Byrd, Mary Cardoza, Gary Cooke, Monica Cooper, Forest Crowe, Evelyn Cunningham, Chris Darway, Jeff Ensminger, Gary Epstein, James Fickes, Richard & Sassi Fisher, Harold Frisch, Bill & Anne Furtick, Jerie Garbutt, Mary Giambalvo, Mella Griffen, David Gurney, Linda Hauss, Art & Doris Henzgen, Mei Hoh, Larry Hollis, Steve Johnson, Stanton Keck, Carie Kedrick, James & Lisa King, Michelle King, Jim Kramme, Alexandra Lee, Kathy Longacre, Joe Malatesta, Mary Matakovich, Joel McCormick, Whitney McIlvaine, Mike & Joan Metz, Father Albert Meyer, Jan Miller, Keri Mogret, Kendra Moshe, Henry Mulder, Rev. Stephen Odenbrett, Dattatraya Paranjpe, Russee Parvin, Sheree Pellemeier, John & Sandra Pirghaibi, Cheryl Price, Peter Risley, Eric Rose, Rachel Rosenthal, Jay Ruskey, Carol Schuldt, Wally & Dorothy Seelos, Frank Servedio, Elsie Shimamoto, Norm & Loren Shirakata, Pete Simmons, Mark Skinner, Bailey Smith, Teresa Smith, Darrell & Gloria Snow, Robert & Zoë Sunderland, Patricia Sutton, Harry Toy, Fidel Villanueva, Rich & Laura Vorle, Hugh Wadman, Richard Wagner, Mary Walcher, Kenneth Warren, and Margaret Wiggin.

California Native Plant Society and Society of American Foresters: Thursday, December 2 at 7:00 PM "Sudden Oak Death Syndrome" at the SLO Vets' Hall on the corner of Monterey St. & Grand Ave. For more information, call Charles Blair 733-3189 or Dirk Walters 543-7051.

Help Needed! If **you** have any great ideas for articles for this newsletter, or if you would like to write an article related to growing "rare" fruit, please contact me at handynana@hortons.us or write me at 265 Rim Rock Rd., Nipomo, CA 93444

Final Meeting of 2004

December 11: Holiday Potluck Luncheon at the PG&E Community Center in San Luis Obispo. Meeting starts at 12:30 P.M. Bring your favorite "holiday dish" to share with 10-15 others, as well as those extra plants you have grown for the Plant Exchange and Plant Raffle. (Please clean the bottom of your plant containers and label the plants as best you can.) Directions to the Community Center: From the **north** on 101, take the San Luis Bay Drive exit to the stop sign, make a right turn and immediately turn left (west) down the frontage road, **Ontario Road**. The Community Center will be on your right about half a block at **6588 Ontario Rd**. From the **south** on 101 take the San Luis Bay Drive exit to the stop sign, turn left and cross **over** the freeway. Make a left turn on the frontage road (not the on-ramp!) which is Ontario Road. The Community Center will be on your right about a half block down at **6588 Ontario Rd**.

Calendar of Meetings - 2005

January 8: Annual Pruning Meeting, Elections, and Plant Sale at Cal Poly Crop Science Building. Our guest speaker and "Guest Pruner" will be Mr. Dan Lassanske, Professor of Ornamental Horticulture at Cal Poly. We will hold our annual officer elections too. Bring your neighbor and a pair of loppers--we prune our orchard at this meeting. We will also be planting a Memorial Fruit Tree in honor of Ralph Vorhies, a long time member of CRFG and a professor in the Crop Science Department at Cal Poly. Dan Ray will have his students all lined up with the traditional Cal Poly Fruit Tree Sale, too! Refreshments: H through R please. This meeting draws many guests!

February 12: Annual Scion Exchange and Grafting Party at Cal Poly Crop Science Building. This is always a fun meeting with many guests attending. Collect, label, and store your favorite scion wood to share with others. This is a "rain or shine" meeting. Apple rootstock, grafting knives, and Buddy tape will be for sale. We will have a "guest grafter" to teach us some new grafting skills! Refreshments: S through Z please.