

The Leaflett

California Rare Fruit Growers - Central Coast Chapter

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2004--The Year of the Berry

Watermelon

Citrullus lanatus



As difficult as it is to imagine, this fruit, which conjures up the very essence of summer, really is a berry! The watermelon is thought to be native to somewhere near the Kalahari in Africa where it has long provided food and water for wildlife, native peoples, and desert travelers. (That intrepid explorer, Dr. David Livingstone, is credited with discovering the watermelon's African origin.) It was domesticated around 4,000 years ago by the ancient Egyptians and grown in the fertile soils of the Nile Valley.

The Greeks and Romans who visited Egypt had to have known of watermelons, but the fruit was not introduced to Europe until after the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula in 711 when Berbers (Moors) settling Spain and Portugal brought the fruit across the Strait from

North Africa. Cultivation of watermelons did not spread through Europe quickly though; it took until the 16th and 17th centuries before the fruit was commonly grown.

The Spanish introduced the fruit to the Americas in the 1500s and watermelon cultivation spread rapidly among American natives. Watermelon seed trade is said to have moved through the Americas faster than European explorers! Watermelons were grown in Massachusetts and Florida in the early 1600s and French explorers arriving in the Mississippi Valley in the late 1600s found the natives already planting and eating the fruit.

Because it is native to warm African climates, watermelon is tender to frost and requires a long growing season with relatively high temperatures. Daytime temperatures between 70 and 80 degrees F and nighttime temperatures between 65 and 70 degrees F are ideal. Watermelons grow well in most areas, but foliar diseases are less of a problem in drier climates. Weather along the Central Coast is not the best for watermelon culture, being rather cooler and moister than is ideal, but that is not to say you can't grow this wonderful berry! If you live inland, where summer fog is not prevalent, you should have excellent results if you follow some simple guidelines.

About May, you can plant the seed directly in the garden in a sunny location in well-amended slightly acid soil. (Old tires make great raised individual planters. Fill the tires with organic-rich compost that "raises" the soil level to the top. The black tires also help absorb heat.) Sow 6-8 seeds around a 12 inch diameter hill or tire mound. Seeds should germinate in about 5-7 days. After germination, thin to 2-3 seedlings per hill. Plant spacing for hills is 6 feet. If planted in rows, thin to 2 feet apart in rows spaced at 8 feet. Seed may be started indoors 3-4 weeks before planting outdoors, but transplanting

seedlings is not always successful and doesn't really seem to give you much of a head start. Covering your rows or mounds with black plastic helps retain heat, keep out weeds, and hold in moisture. Melons require generous amounts of water in order to support quick vine growth in early summer. It's a good idea to use soaker hoses or a drip irrigation system to provide sufficient water. However, once the first fruit begins to ripen, cut way back on watering. Too much water at ripening time will dilute the fruit's sugars. And that's about it!

What varieties of watermelon should you plant? Now that's where the choices come in! There are big ones, small ones, red ones, and yellow ones. There are some with seeds and some that are seedless. ("**Seedless watermelon**" seems to be an oxymoron—without seeds, how does the watermelon reproduce? According to *Dr. Daryl G. Richardson, Horticulture Department, Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR October 4, 1993*: "They are reproduced from hybrid seeds (thus they're very expensive!) which are triploids, but they do not produce viable seeds in the developing fruits, due to unreduced gametes from the triploids. Theoretically they could be maintained as vegetative cuttings, but that is pretty impractical until the next growing season. This actually has been a very clever breeding trick to get seedlessness in melons, grapes, and I think they're working on tomatoes. Seedlessness (known as parthenocarpy) is fairly common in apples and pears and to some extent in avocados.")

So, once you have your watermelons growing, how do you know when one is **perfectly** ripe? It's easy if you follow these guidelines: **Appearance**: Look it over. Choose a symmetrical watermelon that is free of bruises, cuts and dents. **Weight**: Lift it up. The watermelon should be heavy for its size. **Ripeness**: Turn it over. The underside of a ripe watermelon is yellow and the rind has healthy sheen.

Watermelons are good for you, low in calories, and perfect to eat fresh out of the garden, cooled in the refrigerator, cut into fruit salad, blended into drinks, frozen into sorbet, or, you might like to try the following recipe—which is one way I'd bet not many of you have ever eaten watermelon!

Deep-Fried Watermelon

1 watermelon , about 10 lb	2 egg whites, beaten
11 Tbsp flour	3 cups vegetable oil for deep-frying use
7 Tbsp cornstarch	Powdered sugar

Cut the watermelon in half and scoop out the pulp. Remove any seeds from the pulp and cut the pulp into diamonds, then coat with the flour. Mix the egg whites with cornstarch and a little water into a batter. Heat the oil in a wok over high fire to about 250 degrees F (120 degrees C), or until small bubbles appear around a 1-inch (2 cm) cube of day-old bread dropped into the oil. Dip the watermelon pieces in the batter and add to the oil. Deep-fry until the coating becomes firm. Turn off the heat and continue to deep-fry the watermelon until light brown. Remove, drain well, sprinkle with the sugar, and serve. Yield: 12 servings

June Meeting

At the June meeting held at the Willow Creek Olive Ranch in Paso Robles, 58 members and guests attended. We all had to agree with co-chair Roger Eberhardt's comment that the R through Z people really raised the bar on refreshments!

One special "guest", Mr. Jack Swords of Nipomo, had not been to a meeting in about six years, but he was one of the "Founding Fathers" of our CRFG Chapter. Jack was introduced by Art Henzgen who also gave a little history lesson on how our chapter started. Jack lives in Nipomo for 6 months of the

year and then moves to La Paz, Mexico for the other 6 months. Jack has an extensive planting of "mature" rare fruit in Nipomo and someday soon, we must visit this super special orchard!

After a brief business meeting led by Roger Eberhardt, Joeli Yaguda, of the Willow Creek Olive Ranch gave an introduction to olive oil, talking about different flavors and uses of olive oil, how the pressing of oil affects its flavor, and what defects in oil should be avoided when buying. She then gave us a tour of the facility, with the highlight of the event being the oil tasting hosted by Joeli, Josh Yaguda-Miller, and their wonderful staff. The lemon-flavored oil (made from olives crushed in the press with the peels of Meyer lemons, and sold with an excellent recipe for Linguine Alle Vongole Bianche, a dish made of clams and pasta with white wine and lemon olive oil Included), was a big hit, but our group made plenty of other purchases from the award winning **Pasolivo** line! (See Larry Hollis making his purchase from Kylie.) Willow Creek Olive Ranch California Blend Extra Virgin Olive Oil is made from Mission, Manzanillo, and Sevillano olives and was specially made for the Farmer's Markets here on the Central Coast and is perfect for everyday in the kitchen: from sautéing to marinating to mixing for salad dressing.



Pasolivo Extra Virgin Olive Oil, from the December 2003 pressing, was the Gold Medal winner, 2004 Olive Oils of the World. According to Joeli (shown on left in her special CRFG hat), the November-December 2003 harvest produced exceptionally green, fruity, grassy oil. They crushed the olives, (a blend of Frantoio, Pendolino, Leccino, Lucca, and Moraiolo olives grown in their 55-acre orchard) in their own mill within hours of handpicking. The oil is then estate bottled, which gives them control of the product from the ground up! And what a wonderful product it is!

If you missed the meeting you will have another chance to learn about this process on **October 15 - 17** at the **Paso Robles Harvest Festival**. At that time you can visit the Tasting Room for tastings and olive oil treats over the Wine Harvest Festival weekend!

The Festival of Fruit

By Joe Sabol

The annual meeting of the California Rare Fruit Growers, the "Festival of Fruit," was held at Cal Poly, Pomona on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, June 18-20. Six of our members attended including Norman Beard, Robert and Carol Scott, John and Choung Crowe, and Joe Sabol. There were well over 400 participants registered for the Festival. There were some fantastic tours on Friday and Sunday with the general meeting and the biggest crowd on Saturday. The Festival was hosted by the Los Angeles Chapter and it was obvious that they had done an outstanding job of organizing the big event. There were 25 featured speakers from all over the nation.

The staff from Dave Wilson Nursery was there and conducted a delicious fruit tasting party during the lunch hour. Commercial nurseries set up their displays and sold exotic fruit trees and vines all day long. It was a shopper's paradise! There were concurrent sessions every hour so the participants had to select one session from the list of 4 or 5 for each hour of the day!!

Joe Sabol conducted an apple grafting session and had lots of help from Norm Beard, John Crowe and Robert Scott. There were 70 participants that grafted an apple tree and took home a free tree! There were about 30 other participants who watched and wished they had been one of the first 70 to enter the room!

The Festival of Fruit for 2005 will be held at UC Santa Cruz and will probably be sometime in the middle of September 2005. Let's all make plans to attend this educational and festive event in 2005.

Meet Your Board Member(s) Pet & Marv Daniels

If you've been to at least one of our Central Coast CRFG events, you will most likely have seen the smiling faces of board members Pet and Marv Daniels—since they rarely miss a meeting! They have been active with the Central Coast Chapter of the CRFG for the past 10 plus years and are “rare fruit” growers on their property in Pismo Beach.

Pet is an avid fan of tropical fruit, which she attributes to her early youth being spent in Africa where fruit was abundant, but meat was not as readily available. Marv, on the other hand, learned to love fruit mostly after his marriage to Pet 20 years ago. He grew up on a ranch outside of King City where he ate lots of beef and few fruits and vegetables. (Just to show what love can do, for about 10 years, Pet and Marv were vegetarians!)



They were both married once previously and are parents through those marriages; Pet has four children and Marv two. Marv works for PG&E and he retires next year when he will have more time to join Pet in pruning the tropical paradise they have created in Pismo Beach. Pet is especially fond of their mature Cherimoya and white sapote, but they also grow an incredible number of other fruits most of us have only heard about. While the Daniels have some of the “normal” citrus trees—lemon, lime, and orange—they also have mandarin tangerines, limequats, and a very special grapefruit called a cocktail grapefruit. The cocktail grapefruit is “wonderful, thin-skinned, and sweet” according to Pet and it thrives in the cool weather along the coast. They have tried growing bananas with limited success. “Bananas just don’t get sweet here. It’s too cool,” says Pet. But guavas, Feijoas, and strawberry guavas do very well for them. They are especially proud of the small, but sweet and seedless grapes that they got from a CRFG plant expert in Southern California that goes by the name “New York and a number.” These grapes do well in the cool weather and have a very long ripening season, beginning in early July and lasting until about October. “They don’t ripen in a clump, so we have them growing on our porch where we can stand and selectively pick ripe ones and eat them immediately.”

When I mentioned to Pet how much I missed tree-ripened papayas (having just returned from Hawaii where I ate one every morning!) she agreed that they wouldn’t grow well here, but that I might like the fruit tree she and Marv grow known as a babaco. The babaco is related to the papaya, but, as a native to Ecuador, it is much more suited to our cool sub-tropical climate. It will withstand temperatures to about 28° F. The thin skin is even edible. She says it makes a wonderful smoothie that tastes like lemon sherbet if it is blended with a little sugar and some lemon juice to enhance its lemon-like flavor.

One of their rarest trees is the Jaboticaba. Jaboticabas adapt well to our subtropical climate, surviving temperatures as low as 22-27°F even when young. The tasty fruits, which are small and look like grapes in both size and color, are remarkable because they don't grow at the ends of branches, but rather all the way up the trunk of the tree!

Pet mentioned other interesting fruits she and Marv grow (like the pepino dulce, a 3-4" long fruit with a melon-like flavor, which she says taste great in salads), but when the Daniels aren't working in their garden, they are usually busy promoting growing fruit to others! Every year Marv buys 10-20 apple rootstocks which he pots, grafts, labels, and then donates to organizations around the area to promote CRFG. They jointly head up the Community Orchard task force, along with Dr. Joe Sabol. Both of them are actively involved with the high school apple grafting classes and—as if all that weren't enough—they are coordinators for the Dave Wilson Nursery fruit tasting events here.

Oh, and while it isn't edible, Pet is particularly proud of her bamboo collection which consists of 13 varieties of tropical clumping bamboos. So next time you see the Daniels, give them a big "thank you" for all the effort they make to perpetuate growing rare fruit and to keep our great club on the right track!

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. Don't forget to check if the Richard Shimamoto Memorial Japanese maple tree needs water! It is located beneath the big sycamore tree near the entrance to the orchard. If you see something that needs doing, be a good member and pitch right in to do the job—especially the job of tossing fallen fruit over the fence for the wildlife!

The Reason For Joe Sabol's Gardening Success!



We've all wondered how Joe manages to grow so much so successfully on his mere acre of land! We've speculated that it was his raised beds, collected rain water, or fabulous compost. But now the truth is out! Joe's real secret to success is the use of child labor—and here is the photo to prove it! (Really, this is Dr. Joe and his three-year-old grandson, Joe III, who is evidently following in his grandfather's footsteps!)

Do you have children or grandchildren, or even neighborhood children who could benefit by learning a love of growing things from you? There is a need for "getting back to the soil" for our youngsters. We know how therapeutic gardening can be, but too many young people are plopped in front of televisions and computers and are completely out of touch with this basic pleasure. As a member of CRFG, you can make a difference in helping spread the joy of growing a plant—even if it isn't a rare one.

When my grandson was four, he was helping me in my vegetable garden. I started cleaning up my tools to go in the house when he reminded me I wasn't done yet as there was still a small bag of seed potatoes to be planted. I told him it wasn't time yet, that we had to wait for the "dark of the moon" to put them in the ground. Later that evening he came to me wearing his garden boots, flashlight in hand, and said, "Okay, Nana, it's dark now. We gotta plant potatoes!"

Announcements

Welcome New Members in June: Jack & Mary Kay Swords, Jane A. Kulick, and Larry Hollis.

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

July 10: John Swift's Place. John is a long time CRFG friend who lives in Clark Canyon, near Los Osos. He grows many types of "rare fruit" for a living, but his specialty is Feijoa. His street address is: **3698 Clark Valley Rd. Los Osos**. We will be meeting at the old ranch house for the business meeting. Here are detailed instructions for reaching his place: The pavement ends on Clark Valley Rd. Go straight one-half mile to Bear Creek Ranch sign; veer left to green gate and Bear Creek Ranch sign. Go through the gate and follow the main road for over a mile past an old barn and corrals to the ranch house with tall redwood tree. The phone at the ranch house is 541-1041. **Please remember to bring chairs to this meeting. Refreshments: A through H**

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". There are over 80 people already signed up for this event and Joe Sabol will bring the list to the July meeting at John Swift's place. There should be no problem filling both buses with our own members, so there is no need to advertise and invite neighbors or other Garden Clubs unless they are serious candidates for joining CRFG! 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!) Are **you** on the reservation list? 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, but mark your calendars now. You won't want to miss this!

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 or you may reach me by phone at **474-6501**. Lennette Horton, Newsletter Editor