

The Leaflett

California Rare Fruit Growers - Central Coast Chapter Newsletter
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2006 – The Year of the Healthful Grape

No Sour Grapes!



In Aesop's fable, *The Fox and the Grapes*, a hungry fox, upon failing to reach a bunch of ripe grapes hanging high on a vine, said, "The grapes are sour anyway!" The moral of the story is: *It is easy to despise what you cannot get.*

There is no fear of not being able to get what you want this year! By the end of the **Year of the Healthful Grape**, you should have all the necessary knowledge to grow sweet, healthy grapes right in your own backyard (or even in your own front yard as we do! Those are some of our Syrah grapes pictured on the left.)

While grapes probably aren't thought of as "rare fruit", it is amazing how much work it takes to grow a really good grape of either the wine (*Vitis vinifera*) or eating variety (*Vitis labrusca*). As our chapter is hosting the Festival of Fruit this year, and since our area has become so well known for its wine grapes, it is only fitting that we celebrate this ancient fruit in 2006!

Vitacea

Vitis vinifera L ssp.silvestris

Wine Grapes

Grapes are classified botanically as "true berries" because the fruit wall (pericarp) is fleshy all the way through. There are fossilized remains of grape-like plants from the Tertiary era spread over most of the world. However, the wild grape which is considered by **most** experts to be the progenitor of 99 per cent of modern wine grapes grew prehistorically in Asia Minor along the Black Sea, an area that today includes countries such as Armenia, Turkey, and Georgia (part of the former USSR). Although there are other wild grape species, such as those growing in China and even North America, the Eurasian wild grape, *Vitis vinifera L ssp.silvestris*, has become the predominate cultivated wine grape.

Tracing the **exact** origins of modern varieties is difficult and a matter of often heated debate. This is mainly due to the vine's ability to adapt. It has flourished in a broad range of climates and latitudes, is one of the most variable of all domesticated plants and has a large number of genes. These genes are prone to mutation--take a variety to a place with a different climate and soil and the stress seems to encourage mutations. The mutations produce differences like hardier or more vigorous branch growth, leaves of a different size and/or shape, even grapes of a different color.

Stone Age people certainly ate the wild grape and it probably didn't take long for them to learn that leftover grapes sitting in a stone bowl would turn to wine! Although we don't know for a certainty that they made wine, this is called the "Paleolithic Hypothesis" and it was seriously debated at a conference at the Robert Mondavi Winery in 1991 called "The Origins and Ancient History of Wine."

Archeological records show that the grape was **cultivated** as early as 6000 B.C. in Mesopotamia. Wild grape vines are *dioecious*, meaning that separate plants have single-sex flowers and will not bear fruit unless pollinated by insects. Cultivated grape vines, in contrast, are hermaphroditic, meaning that flowers combine male and female parts so pollination can occur simply through the wind blowing. Thus grape vines were among the very first crops that humanity not only cultivated, but also began to cross-breed to make them more suitable for a consistent harvest.

Pottery for food preparation and storage was developed in the same Mesopotamian area about 6000 B.C., too. This allowed a more controlled environment than wide open stone receptacles had, and it was here, in an ancient town known as Hajji Firuz Tepe in the northern Zagros Mountains of modern Iran that the oldest wine "bottle" in the world was discovered. Technically, it wasn't a bottle, but a jar that held about 2 ½ gallons and it was unearthed in the kitchen of a Neolithic mud brick building, dated to ca. 5400-5000 B.C. A yellowish residue in the bottom of the jar was analyzed and found to be wine!

The growing of grapes spread to Egypt by 3000 B.C. (this is depicted on temple wall friezes) and then to Italy and Greece, where viticulture became a highly developed practice. In Greece in a village close to Kalavrita, stands what is probably the oldest grapevine in the world. This huge ancient vine is known as the Pausanias Grapevine after a traveler who first mentioned it in his memoirs in the **2nd century A.D.**

The Egyptians of about 2500 B.C. took their wine so seriously that they even had a "Royal Sealer of Wine" who oversaw the "truth of labeling" of wine. Believe it or not, these ancient wine "labels" carried the same information you might find on a bottle today--name of the estate, location, type of wine, date of vintage, vintner's name, and assessment of quality. An example of such a wine label is Star of Horus on the Height of Heaven (this vineyard estate started around 2600 B.C. or the time of Zoser and lasted to 300 A.D.); Northern Xois District, Chassut Red (Chassut Red was reputed to be not ready to drink until it had aged 100 years!), Sekem-Ka, vintner; very, very fine grade. That's impressive, huh? And while the Latin saying, *in vino veritas* (in wine truth) might be the most well known of the wine epitaphs, the ancient Egyptian proverb "In water you see your own face, but in wine the heart of its garden" has to be a close second.

Of course, grapes and their wine were also used by many civilizations to treat health problems. Modern scientists have shown what ancient peoples simply "knew"—grapes are good for you! Resveratrol is the substance in grapes that scientists believe shows anti-carcinogenic activity. It can inhibit tumor formation in three ways - stopping DNA damage, slowing/halting cell transformation from normal to cancerous and slowing tumor growth. Resveratrol has anti-inflammatory properties and may be very useful for colon cancer prevention, and a wide variety of other tumors. Also, it may be important in reducing heart disease. Red wine consumption has been associated with lower LDL ("bad") and higher HDL ("good") forms of cholesterol. Resveratrol may be the active principal

involved. It is still experimental, but may be a useful drug in the future. Ellagic acid occurs in grapes, too, and may have a number of human health benefits. It has anti-cancer properties and may act as a free radical scavenger. A glass of red wine a day really may keep you fit!

This is just some of the history of the wild grape and how it developed into a modern vine. So, what will it take for you to grow a vineyard—or at least a vine? Check out this space next month when we will get into some of the nuts and bolts of growing a healthy and “healthful” grapevine!

December Meeting

Jingle bells, something smells...good! At least that is what our merry band of fruit loving elves said when they attended the annual December meeting and potluck at the PG&E Community Center. From Norm Beard's turkey, to the fabulous fruity desserts redolent with spices, the scent was pure holiday! Many of our members, in the spirit of the season, wore red clothing items—as you can see in the photo below taken by Paul Moyer. Thanks to Marv Daniels for arranging for the great site and thanks to all of you who participated by bringing food and plants for the plant raffle and exchange. If you missed out this year, make plans NOW to attend in December of 2006. It will be fun!



Work off Some Holiday—uh—Cheer!

Work Day at CRFG Community Orchard at Cal Poly - January 8, 1:30 PM. Purpose: Spruce up the orchard for the pruning meeting of January 14. Bring leaf rake, gloves and snacks. We won't be pruning until the pruning meeting, but will be cleaning and weeding the orchard. For more information contact: Marv Daniels marvnpet@aol.com or Pet Daniels petmarv@aol.com

Adventures with Luffas

By Dave Christie

I am a member of the Central Coast Chapter of the California Rare Fruit Growers (CRFG). It is a real fun outfit to be a member of—and having been a member in several gardening groups, I can say this with some validity. No member is an expert at everything (I may be an exception to that statement—just kidding!) and that is what I love about our fellowship. No one I have found believes that they are above any other member, and all of us are more than willing to give aid and advice to any person who has a question regarding any problem they are having with their plants or trees. Now what, you might ask, has that got to do with the title of this article? Let me try to explain.

I first got interested in plants when my grade school teacher in Scotland brought to the classroom some glass jars, filled them with cotton wool, wet the cotton and placed some dried green peas between it and the glass, then allowed us to watch them sprout and grow. It was fascinating!

Now our chapter happens to have a similar program started by one of our most humble, modest, shy, and bashful members. (Because of his extreme reticence, I can not disclose his name. However his initials happen to be Joe Sabol.) He has set in motion a program that took me back to Scotland sixty-two years ago. Joe and some of his good helpers take apple rootstock into high schools and teach all the young “Dave Christie’s” the miracle of God’s work by showing them how to graft. (Thanks Joe!) By participating in the grafting program to teach others, even this older Dave has learned a thing or two!

We have a position of service in our group known as the program director. This is the member responsible for setting up of our monthly meetings. (I had the privilege of this position for one year, and I know how difficult it can be, finding interesting places to visit.) Joe currently fills this position admirably and he seems to instill excitement in other members to find unusual and fascinating spots for our “outings.”

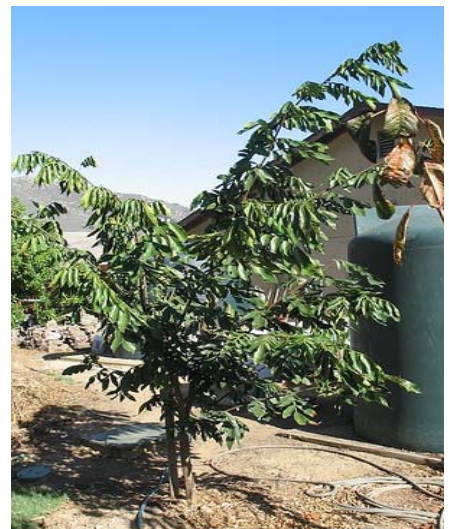
When they came up with the idea for one of our meetings (July, 2005) to be held at the Luffa Sponge Farm, I wondered why in the heck we were going to visit a sponge farm at the ocean. After all, our group is about growing things on land, not in the sea. But, I decided I’d go anyway. Boy was I surprised when I learned luffa sponges do not come from the ocean and that they are actually a member of the cucumber family.

For myself, I found this to be one of the most interesting meetings of the year. Our hostess, Deanne of the Nipomo Luffa Farm, was a friendly down-to-earth person who was more than willing to share her experience in the growing of and the uses of the product. Deanne also freely gave some of the seeds of the luffa plant, saying that she would be happy to purchase all of the luffa that any of us could grow—adding that “if the plant does not like you, it won’t grow”. What a challenge! Since most people think I’m a pretty likeable guy, I figured my chances were good that the plants would like me, too. I took thirty seeds and proceeded to try propagating them. Was I successful? Did the plants like me? Stay tuned for more—adventures with luffa!

Local Rare Fruit of the Month—January—Ice Cream Bean Tree

The ice-cream bean tree (*Inga edulis*) is a nitrogen-fixing tree native to South America, specifically the riverbanks, swamps and lakes of the Brazilian Amazon. In its indigenous environment, it can grow to 100’ tall, although its branches are rather weak and susceptible to wind damage. It is frost sensitive, and is considered sub-tropical, but can tolerate temperatures into the 30’s once it is established. It seems to tolerate a wide range of soils, but likes plenty of water. (The young specimen pictured on the right is growing in San Luis Obispo in Joe Sabol’s yard.)

The tree is easily propagated by seed and it takes about three years before it is mature enough to set pods. The seeds often begin to sprout in the pod before they even fall to the ground. Sprouting seeds lead to weedy trees growing beneath the parent tree if left alone.



The fluffy white inside of the seed pods are a favorite snack with children and are used to flavor ice cream in South America. The flavor is considered "vanilla".

Festival of Fruit 2006

Update by Joe Sabol

Good news from the Sands Suites and Motel!! Owner Jesse Norris has agreed to host a very special "Registration Reception" for the Conference on Thursday afternoon from 3 to 6 p.m. at his hotel. He will provide some vegetable snacks and non-alcoholic beverages too!!! Furthermore, he has reserved a block of rooms for our CRFG Members and will give them a special conference rate if they call before April 1 and indicate they are part of the CRFG Festival of Fruit. So, please alert your out-of-town CRFG Friends to this news as all motel facilities are predicted to be full in early September!!

Other news: Bob Tullock has started over 100 grape cuttings for our guests. The "Speaker Committee" has invited our KEYNOTE speaker and will let us know as soon as the speaker confirms!! Workshop speakers are being considered for the Saturday sessions. If you have suggestions, please give them to Art DeKleine, Bob Tullock, Roger Eberhardt or Lark Carter.

The next meeting of the Festival Steering Committee will be at 6 p.m., Tuesday, January 17, 2006.

Are You Here?

If your name is listed below, it is because your annual chapter newsletter fees are **due in January**. For a mere pittance of **\$6** per year, you are kept informed of chapter activities and you receive this fabulous newsletter! Where else can you get that kind of return for just about **1 ½ cents** per day? To make it an even better value, you could pay \$25, get the newsletter for **five** years, and not have to search for your name for a long time! So check it out! Please send your choice of payment to: **Richard Pottratz, Treasurer, 2430 Leona Avenue, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401.**

Andy Allen, Robert Asbell, Gary Aubuchon, James Best, David Biddle, Sheree Brekke, Nathan Carmack, Dr. Lark Carter, Benjamin Chow, Gary Cooke, Monica Cooper, Forest Crowe, Christie Cutter, Bernard Diggins, Maurice Elmore, Candace Evenson, Roberta Foster, Gary Fourer, Norma Frey, Bill & Anne Furtick, David Gurney, Alice Hamrick, Delbert Herschback, Mei Hoh & Richard Phillips, Carol Hopper, Steve Johnson, Karen Kolba, Michelle Kong, Dorothy Laine, Chuck & Jennifer Lenet, Amber Madlem, Joe Maletesta, Ruth Martin, Mike & Joan Metz, Paul Nash, Francoise Nigro, Dale Norrington, Vincent Nutile, Dattatraya Paranjpe, Ben & Jackie Parker, Alessia Passalacqua, D. K. Philbin, Don Pritchard, Daniel Ray, John Ricci, Jim & Bridget Ritterbush, Stanley Rose, Rachel Rosenthal, Eunice Scarbouough, Otto Schmidt, Frank Servedio, Norm & Loren Shirakata, Harry Toy, Nancy Tweedie, Fidel Villanueva, and Kristie Wells.

Dormant Pruning and Saving Scion Wood

Many of us are pruning our deciduous fruit trees in December, January and February. We hope you will consider saving some of your best shoots for our annual Scion Exchange in February. There are two ways to do this: First, as you prune, save those freshly cut scions! Label them, bundle them up in 10 to 12 inch lengths, pencil thick, healthy wood only, and put them in a polyethylene bag with one moist paper towel, and put in your refrigerator. The second method is, as you prune your tree do NOT prune the best scion wood. Leave those 10 or 20 shoots on the tree until February 17, the day before our Scion Exchange! You must handle these with great care because the buds may be pushing and more pronounced and more likely to be broken off with rough handling. If you do this

pruning on the afternoon of February 17, label them, and place them in a poly bag with a wet paper towel--but no need to put all these in a refrigerator!!! Joe Sabol, (805) 544-1056

CRFG Board of Directors Meeting

The Board of Directors for the CRFG conducted a 3 hour Board Meeting in December, using the telephone and a conference call that sure saved on travel and lodging costs. There are 22 chapters throughout California and several other states!! Some chapters are rather small and some have their meetings in the same location every month. Some chapters have major plant sales and still others give scholarships to deserving young people. There is a lot of diversity in the 22 chapters. One thing that all chapters have in common is a strong tie to the CRFG. We are all part of a larger family, the CRFG. One of the benefits of the CRFG is a good insurance program. Insurance is certainly critical to our chapter with all the monthly "field trips" we take, all the grafting we do, and with all the work we perform in our community orchard.

A major topic for the Board Meeting in December was our insurance. Our insurance has gone up recently and we are also asking our carrier to provide even more insurance. The need for insurance is critical to all chapters and this need has generated a ton of ideas, suggestions, and comments from Board Members and Chapter Chairs. There are many ideas about how to pay for our insurance and it will be up to the local chapter to decide how they will pay their "fair share." One thing is for sure; we need **all** members of our Chapter to make a new year's resolution to write a check for \$30 and join CRFG and be part of the family!!

Announcements

Welcome to Our Chapter: Paul Bestwick, Ken Farrow, and Paul Rhys.

Web Site: Check our site at: www.crfg-central.org to see what our web-master, Art DeKleine and his very able assistants, John and Choung Crowe, are doing to keep us all informed.

Join the Parent Organization: Many of our chapter members are also members of the Parent association and, for those of you who aren't, perhaps you **should** consider joining. With parent organization membership you receive a wonderful color magazine, *The Fruit Gardener*, filled with great articles on fruit growing, news, many chapter activities and contacts. Dues are **\$30 annually** or **3 years for \$87**. Membership applications are available from **Joe Sabol**. Call him at **544-1056** if you can't find him at a meeting.

Return of the Dave Wilson Fruit Tasting Event: Mark your calendars now for **Saturday, August 12, 2006** when Dave Wilson Fruit Tasting will return to Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo. This has been a **wildly** popular event that we weren't able to host this year. (Yes, I **do** mean "wildly". Have you ever seen fruit enthusiasts high on fructose?) Note that this is less than one month before we host the Festival of Fruit. **Your** assistance is not only requested, it is **NEEDED!**

Calendar of Meetings – 2006

Meetings are held the **second Saturday** of the month and **begin at 1:30 PM** unless otherwise indicated. Bring a friend, car pool, and, for most meetings, **bring a chair** for all in your party. Pet Daniels suggests we bring our own bottled water to drink, too. What fun it is to be a member of CRFG!

January 14—Annual Business and Pruning Meeting—Cal Poly Crops Unit: Dan Lassanske, a professor at Cal Poly, will return by popular demand. He was great last year in giving us the “theory” behind pruning, but we are hoping this year that it will not rain so we can get “hands-on” experience in our orchard. **Refreshments group H-R please—we have many visitors at this meeting!**

February 18—Annual Scion Exchange—Cal Poly Crops Unit: (Note that this is the third Saturday of the month!) This is another very popular meeting, and one you won't want to miss! We will have a scion exchange, grafting knives for sale, rootstock for sale, and bird net for sale. The Cal Poly students usually have some great plants for sale, too! Come with your U-Haul! **Refreshments group S-Z please—we have many visitors at this meeting, too!**

Central Coast Chapter CRFG Contact Information: Art DeKleine, co-chair, adeklein@calpoly.edu or 543-9455; Bob Tullock, co-chair, tullock@tcsn.net or 238-2868; Joe Sabol, program chair, jsabol@calpoly.edu or 544-1056; Dick Pottratz, treasurer, pottratz@sbcglobal.net; or Lennette Horton, newsletter editor, handynana@gmail.com or 474-6501.