

The Leaflett

California Rare Fruit Growers - Central Coast Chapter Newsletter
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2009

The Year of the Olive

Oleaceae

Olea europaea



Jasper Newton Field was my great-grandfather and he died many years before I was born, but he left a tangible legacy that I will always remember—his olive curing recipe. Jasper arrived in California's Central Valley about 1879, coming from Ohio with his father, Orrin, who knew about the area because he had been stationed nearby at Ft. Miller during the Civil War. They settled near Lemoore with their bees, which they rented out to area farmers, and supplemented that income by picking fruit. They came from an apple growing area in Ohio and many of the fruits growing around them would have been familiar—except for the olives. Exactly when and how Jasper became adept at curing olives (using lye) isn't known, but it was a talent he passed on to my grandmother and her brothers. Visiting grandma's house and going out to the olive barrel that sat under the big weeping willow to "check" the progress of the latest batch of olives was a real treat.

My family never progressed to making olive oil, but my grandmother cured and canned olives (reducing the size of the recipe to fit a 10-gallon crock) until well into her 80's. Those firm green olives with the pits intact were always the centerpiece of any holiday gathering. However much we loved them, though, there were only so many olives we could eat and give away! Nobody wanted to go to the farmer's market and sell them like Jasper had done to augment his income. So, after my grandmother gave up making them, no one else really got into doing it and the "art of curing olives" died out in our family.

It amazes me when I look around our area and see all the olive trees that are being cultivated now. Of course, olive oil has become a "hot" commodity with people who are health conscious. (In late 2007 our local chapter visited the Tiber Canyon Ranch and sampled their exotic oils and we learned about the many benefits of olive oil to health.) However, the olive tree is no "trendy" fruit bearer!

We know of its importance to humans for thousands of years because the olive tree is one of the plants most cited in recorded literature. The olive tree and olives are mentioned over 30 times in the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments. They are written of in Homer's

Odyssey, in the Qur'an, and by many other poets and writers over the centuries. In his writing, the olive was dubbed "the tree that feeds the children" by the philosopher Sophocles. Aldous Huxley wrote the beautiful description: "...I like them all, but especially the olive, for what it symbolizes, first of all, peace with its leaves and joy with its golden oil." Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, wrote that he used the juices of fresh olives as a cure for mental illness and poultices of ground olives for healing ulcers.

Olive trees are considered practically immortal. Their incredible resistance to harsh elements probably helped bolster the notion that olive oil would provide strength and youth to those who consume it. In many cultures, olive branches also symbolize peace, longevity, fertility, maturity, wealth and prosperity.

The olive is a native of the Mediterranean, Asia Minor, and even parts of Africa. However, its cultivation has now spread throughout the world to wherever a temperate climate can be found. The tree provides a source of olive oil, fine wood, olive leaf extract, and olives for consumption.



Archeological evidence has shown that olives were being used as early as 7000 years ago and it is known that olives and olive oil were being grown and used commercially as early as 3000 BC in Crete. The Egyptians cultivated olive groves, as shown in an inscription on a temple to the god Ra, from the time of Ramses II (1197-1165 BC), which told that the olive groves around the city of Heliopolis gave pure oil, the best quality in all of Egypt, for lighting the lamps in sacred places. Pliny the Elder (AD 23-79), a Roman historian and naturalist, wrote of a sacred Greek olive tree that was 1600 years old. Several trees in the Garden of Gethsemane (from the Hebrew words "gat shemanim" or olive press) in Jerusalem are claimed to date back to the time of Jesus. Two giant olive trees in the Arab town of Arraba and five trees in Deir Hanna, both in Israel's Galilee region, have been determined to be over 3000 years old. All seven

trees continue to produce olives. The olive tree of Vouves in Chania Prefecture in Crete is about 3500 years old, and while its age cannot be precisely determined, it is considered the oldest olive tree in the world. The trunk has perimeter of 12.5 m and diameter of 4.6 m and it still produces olives. It belongs to the variety tsounati.

The Franciscan monks brought olives to the New World in the 1500's. In the tiny Mexican town of Tzintzuntzan there are still trees living that date from that time, as shown in the photo on the right from PRI's The World. The first olive trees were planted in California at the San Diego Mission by Franciscan monks in 1769. The trees were planted throughout California with the intention of producing oil, but the lower cost European olive oils won out. (The oldest of the Franciscan olive groves are in northern California—the older ones in southern



California lost out to urban sprawl.) In the late 1800's, a housewife, Freda Ehmann and her son, Edwin began experimenting with new ways to market the olive, and she found success with the California style ripe black olives she produced.

Olive wood has a beautiful grain that takes polishing well. It is a hard wood that is highly prized for woodworking. Once an olive tree reaches about 200 years of age, it loses its trunk and sends up shoots. That's why it is considered an "immortal" tree and why the wood can be harvested without destroying the tree. (That's also why it is difficult to determine an ancient tree's age.)



The health benefits of using olive oil are well documented. Recent research has now provided firm proof that a Mediterranean diet, which includes

olive oil, is not only generally healthy, but that consuming olive oil can actually help lower harmful LDL cholesterol. Olive oil contains antioxidants that discourage artery clogging and chronic diseases, including cancer. Drunk before a meal, olive oil protects the stomach from ulcers. If a spoon or two is taken with lemon or coffee, it prevents constipation without irritating the intestinal tract. It is also effective in treating urinary tract infections and gall bladder problems. It is a perfect remedy for gastritis in children; it accelerates brain development and strengthens the bones. Olive oil dissolves clots in capillaries, has been found to lower the degree of absorption of edible fats, and consequently slows down the aging process.

So, if you want to grow your own olive tree, what does it take? It takes just what you have on the Central Coast—a temperate climate with a bit of winter chill and rather nutrient starved calciferous soil with little water. The tree is more liable to disease in rich soils, and the oil is inferior to the produce of poorer and rockier ground. The old belief was that olives did best near the ocean. There are thousands of cultivars of the olive. In Italy alone at least three hundred cultivars have been enumerated, but only a few are grown to a large extent. None of these can be accurately identified with ancient descriptions, though it is not unlikely that some of the narrow-leaved cultivars most esteemed may be descendants of the Licinian olive, described by Pliny the Younger (61/63 - ca. 113) as one of the best of the 15 cultivars known in his day. The California "Mission" olive is a great choice if you want to cure your own olives for eating or for pressing oil.



The Sevillano is the largest California commercial variety, but it is good only for pickling and eating. It has very little oil content. Or, you could go on-line and order your own olive tree from Israel for only \$49 delivered—just so you can say you have one! (Photo is of a tree in Bethlehem.)

Oh, did I mention that the biggest factor in growing your own olive tree is patience? They don't develop really fast! (After all—**they've** got hundreds of years to mature!)

November Meeting



and Dr. Art DeKleine as they prepare for the meeting.)

On November 8, we held a meeting at the, the San Luis Obispo High School Ag Department. We held a brief business meeting and there were several short presentations by local chapter members on making name tags for trees and plants, proper watering techniques for baskets, trees, and lawns, and guidelines for the December Plant Raffle and Exchange. (The photo on the left, by Joe Sabol, shows the students, teacher Erin Thompson,

The meeting was then turned over to Erin Thompson, SLOHS horticulture teacher, who talked about the horticulture program at SLOHS and shared her dreams for the greenhouse during the coming year. She is very enthusiastic about helping high school students develop an interest in greenhouses. Erin then introduced one of her students, Felicia, and her able assistants. Felicia talked about propagating plants in the greenhouse and then demonstrated how to make a basket. We were led to outdoor workstations where we were able to put our new knowledge to work with materials provided by SLOHS horticulture students. It was a great "hands-on" meeting with plenty of incentive to do our best job since our results were judged by the students! (Felicia demonstrates proper planting technique in the photo above.)



The photos below, also taken by Joe Sabol, show just how much fun everyone had! Patti took third prize with her lovely basket!)



December Meeting

By Joe Sabol

The annual Holiday Potluck Meeting was held on Saturday, December 13 and was probably the biggest December meeting in our history. Marv Daniels lined up the PG&E Visitor's Center and the meeting started at 12:30 PM. (Thank you, Paul Moyer, for the great group shot of over 130 people!)



Gisele Schoniger was our guest speaker and she arrived early to set up the room and to pass out all sorts of goodies. She was an outstanding speaker for Kellogg Supply Company and Dr. Earth plant nutrition. Her knowledge and enthusiasm held the audience like a magnet. She told the story of Dr. Earth and went into details on the benefits of mycorrhizal activity in the soil and on the roots of our plants. Her passion for her job was an inspiration to all. Thanks to Art DeKleine and Kathy Longacre for lining up this great speaker.

The potluck was a delightful spread of delicious nutrition. A big thanks goes to Gloria DeKleine and Jill Sabol for cooking the main meat dishes and to all those who contributed to the holiday meal. The dessert table was a sight to see and even more fun to taste!

The rootstock sale was the best ever. Our tradition has been to pre-order rootstock at the December meeting and receive a special "sale price" good only on this date. Over \$600 worth of rootstock was ordered and paid for, a new record!!

Then it came time for the long awaited Plant Raffle. Pet and Marv Daniels had worked hard to get our members to donate the best fruit producing trees and vines for this annual event. Jack Swords donated 50 plants--all fruit bearing plants and many of them "rare" for this area! Gisele contributed some Dr. Earth products and other members contributed a bird house and an owl box to get things rolling. Dave Christy was energetic at the microphone and kept everyone awake and alert. Marv reported a net income of over \$500 for the plant raffle! A big thanks to all those who grew and then donated plants for this annual event!!

Finally, we must say thanks to the dedicated "clean-up crew" that worked hard behind the scenes, during the plant raffle, to get the PG&E facility back in shape after our big meal and meeting. The success of our chapter depends upon many volunteers who work hard, often behind the scenes, to make our meetings educational, fun and keep us all comfortable.

What a wonderful way it was to end our year! Enjoy some of the photos of the event below.



Santa and Giselle, our vibrant speaker.

The question is—how many of you believe in Santa?



And the winner is...



Apple Tree Planting and Grafting in the Fall!

"To everything there is a season..." except when it comes to our intrepid apple tree planters and grafters who know no season in their pursuit of sharing their knowledge and love of apples! On November 5th, Dr. Joe Sabol and Dr. Art DeKleine went to Monarch Grove School where they gave a brief grafting lesson, then helped Mr. Cyr's Fifth Grade class plant a tree and learn how to take care of it. The following day, Dr. Joe and helpers Marv and Pet Daniels and Art Henzgen went to Bishop's



Peak-Teach School where they assisted two more fifth grade classes with their two trees. The trees were bare root, semi-dwarf apples that had been grafted in the spring with Gala or Fuji scion wood and then planted in 5-gallon containers. Later, in the month, on November 19, the process was repeated at Bishop's Peak-Teach School. (Photo by Joe Sabol shows Mr. Cyr's class.)

But the really amazing happening was the grafting done by Larry Hollis and Patti Schober at the

Midstate Fair in **October**. Using Pink Lady scion wood provided by Joe Sabol, these two expert grafters gave a grafting demonstration and by the end of November four of the five grafts were actually growing and the fifth had swollen buds! Good work you two!

Announcements

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS: Jim & Tish Gentry, Peter & Gail Simmons, and Carolyn Eicher & Andy Zink.

JOIN CRFG: If you **haven't** joined the national organization of the **California Rare Fruit Growers**, why not? With your membership you receive a wonderful color magazine, *The Fruit Gardener*, filled with great articles on fruit growing, news, many chapter activities and contacts. You can also vote on important membership issues and even elect the governing board. Where else can you get so much for a mere \$2.50 a month? That's less than one trip to that specialty coffee place! 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 or sign-up online at www.crfg.org

CHAPTER NEWSLETTER FEES: Please be sure your chapter newsletter fees are current and save our treasurer, Dick Pottratz, lots of work and begging. Newsletter fees are due January 1 of each year. Looking to save some money? Then pay the five-year rate of \$25 and you will save \$5 (since the **annual fee is \$6**)!

Santa Barbara Chapter Scion and Plant Exchange Meeting: Saturday, January 17, beginning at 10:00 AM at the Norman Beard Nursery, 200 Ellwood Ridge Road, Goleta. The guest speaker, Chris Cullen, owner of Montecito Landscape, has been creating beautiful gardens in the Santa Barbara area for over 38 years—many for celebrities whose names you will quickly recognize. There will be a scion wood and winter plant exchange. Norman Beard also has many plants for sale. If you would like to purchase bare root trees prior to the

meeting, give him a call at 968-0989. Norman also has many kinds of mango and citrus trees on site.

Directions: Directions: 101 North to Winchester Canyon Road, continue toward mountains, make right on Cathedral Oaks Road, first left on Ellwood Canyon Road, right up hill to first place on Ellwood Ridge road. 101 South, take Hollister Ave. off ramp, make left back over freeway, make right on Calle Real, make Left on Cathedral Oaks Road, continue past Winchester Canyon Road to Ellwood Canyon road, first left, then right up hill on Ellwood Canyon Road to first place on right.

Hesperia Hall Apple Grafting: Friday, March 20, 5 PM in Hesperia, California. Join Marv and Pet Daniels as they enjoy another fun time at the Hesperia Community Hall. They will be giving a grafting demonstration and then assisting community members as they graft their own trees. They had so much fun there last year that they have agreed to do it again! The class is followed by a wonderful potluck dinner. Contact them at: Marvnpet@aol.com

2009 High School Grafting Program: It isn't too early to begin planning to help Joe Sabol and his reliable crew with this year's grafting program at local high schools. Don't make Joe plead! Give him a call now at **544-1056** and volunteer your time! **It is so much fun!**

Writers Wanted: **We need articles for this newsletter!** Share your knowledge—or even your bad experiences—with other chapter members. Explain how to grow your favorite rare fruit—even if you haven't done it yet! I will be happy to help you edit it if you wish. Send your article to me at: handynana@gmail.com

2009 CRFG Festival of Fruit—Plan ahead to attend the 2009 Festival of Fruit hosted this year by the Redwood Empire Chapter on **August 15** at the Santa Rosa Junior College campus.

Calendar of Meetings – 2009

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 10—Annual Pruning Meeting—Cal Poly Crops Unit Classroom: Vote for new officers—learn to prune—practice pruning. Our own long-time chapter member and **EXPERT PRUNER**, Dr. Art DeKleine, will be giving us some great pointers on pruning for the home orchard. Don't forget to bring your pruning shears, clippers, loppers, or handsaws, and gloves. Other experienced **PRUNERS** will also be on hand to **assist** novices with **PRUNING!** **Refreshments to be provided by the S-Z Group.** This is a very popular meeting, so **please** bring plenty of snacks to share! Thank you!

February 23—Third Saturday—Annual Grafting Meeting and Scion Exchange—
Outside Cal Poly Crops Unit Classroom: Plan to arrive early for this meeting! We will have a scion exchange, and grafting knives, Buddy Tape, and rootstock for sale. **The refreshments are to be provided by the A-G Group.** This is another **heavily attended** meeting, so **please** bring plenty of snacks to share! Thank you!

Directions to Cal Poly Crops Unit: From San Luis Obispo, take the HWY 101 Santa Rosa exit (Hwy 1) towards Morro Bay. Go to Highland Avenue and enter the Cal Poly campus. You will see Mt. Bishop Road to the left. Turn in immediately and park. There is no parking fee on Saturday.

March 14—Location to be announced: The refreshments are to be provided by the **H-R Group.**

Central Coast Chapter CRFG Contact Information: Larry Hollis, co-chair, L_Hollis@hotmail.com or 704-1513; Patti Schober, co-chair, pwolfy@tcsn.net or 467-2706 ; Art DeKleine, program chair, adeklein@calpoly.edu or 543-9455; Joe Sabol, publicity, jsabol@calpoly.edu or 544-1056; Dick Pottratz, treasurer, pottratz@sbcglobal.net; or Lennette Horton, newsletter editor, handynana@gmail.com or 474-6501.