



Central Coast Chapter CRFG

June 2022 Newsletter
by Jenny Weaver & Tom Sheldon send
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Next CRFG Meeting

When: July 9th, 2022 1:00pm

Where: CRFG Demonstration Orchard, Cal Poly University,
Highland Drive, San Luis Obispo

Park: In Crops Unit Parking Lot, Northwest side of Highland Dr.

No Parking Permit required on Saturday.

It will be a tasty, informative and fun meeting!



Cal Poly Crops Unit Parking and CRFG orchard on Highland Drive

As always, if you feel ill, please stay home.

1) FRUIT TASTING

Bring currently ripe, washed, fruit to share. Fruit should be WHOLE and well labeled with variety, location grown and your name. Some can be cut for tasting. Toothpicks will be provided. We will also have knives, some small cutting boards, small plates and napkins. Gloves will also be available for those cutting fruit.

Water will also be available. Coffee may be available if the weather is cool.

Bring your own chairs. Wear sunscreen and hats as not all may be in the shade.

2) PRESENTATION ABOUT SOIL by Dean Harrell, a Cuesta College agriculture teacher.: You'll learn how to tell what type of soil you have, how to amend your soil and how to diagnose plant nutrient deficiencies.

If you want to determine your soil type, bring at least 2 cups of your soil (rocks included) in a plastic bag. Dean will discuss how you can tell your soil type from the original rocks in it, the texture and more.

3) PLANT EXCHANGE: Bring your healthy, pest-free extra plants to share or trade them for some plants you don't have. Please inspect the pots and plants carefully before bringing to the orchard. We and Cal Poly don't want any extra pests in the orchard!

Announcements

CRFG Orchard Maintenance Day

On Saturday, June 25, 2022 from 9:00 am. – 12 p.m. we had a good turnout of CRFG chapter members who helped tidy up our CRFG Demonstration orchard. Many thanks to all who participated. Dara (one of the 3 co-managers) will write up a thorough report for the next Leaflet...stand by! Thanks to Manny and Dara for the snacks.

July 15-17 2022 Open Farm Days

For a chance to check out many of our SLO County farms, check out this website

<https://farmstaded.com/pages/ofd2022>

July 16, 10:00a.m. – noon. UCCE Master Gardeners "Open Garden Day". 2154 Sierra Way, San Luis Obispo.

Events include a free "create your own miniature succulent garden" workshop, a summer fruit tree pruning demonstration and a helpline plant and pest clinic. Bring your questions and samples.

Visit their website, <https://ucanr.edu/sites/mgslo>

Recent Meeting Notes

CRFG MEETING JUNE 11, 2022

Report by Linda Robertson, chapter secretary

Meeting was chaired by co-chair Seth McMillan. Seth introduced various officers and committee chairs:

- Dara Manker and Manny Magana, orchard managers
- Jenny Weaver, newsletter editor
- Nell Wade, scholarship committee
- Linda Robertson, secretary
- Marv Daniels, board member and on committee teaching grafting to school kids.
- Robert Scott, board member



There will be an orchard workday on Saturday, June 25, from 9 to noon.

The next event for Marv's group teaching grafting has been organized by the Farm Bureau and will be in October, at the Mid-State fairgrounds. The students will be 4th graders from schools in the county. Since Joe's retirement, Marv is looking for volunteers for this and following grafting classes.

Robert Scott, who has been in charge of organizing our annual scion exchange, is stepping down, and we need a successor. There was a discussion of scion exchanges and whether we should resume the exchanges as we used to have them before COVID or continue with the small ones we had at individual members' homes this winter. The resolution seemed to be in favor of having exchanges open to the public.

We will need to order rootstocks by August in order to have them in time for our February exchange. Joe used to do this, but someone needs to take over. Nell will research ordering them.

Our July meeting will be our annual fruit tasting at the CRFG orchard. We'll also be planting a tree.

Our host for this meeting was the Hein family: Martin and his wife Kathryn and two of their children, Margaux and Emily. They have a lovely place on about 38 acres in Arroyo Grande. We got to try several varieties of wine that Martin has made, and he talked to us about his adventures growing wine grapes and avocados on his land. After trying a couple of varieties, he now grows pinot noir



Emily and Margaux Hein gave us a tour of their wine barrel garden
Photo by Jenny

and chardonnay grapes, and he and his wine master are making and selling wine they make from them. He has learned to grow grapevines close together so they compete with one another, improving the quality of the grapes. He has also been growing grapes on their own roots, which he can do without danger from grape phylloxera because his soil is sandy. His avocados haven't fared as well; this year's crop was badly damaged by an untimely freeze.

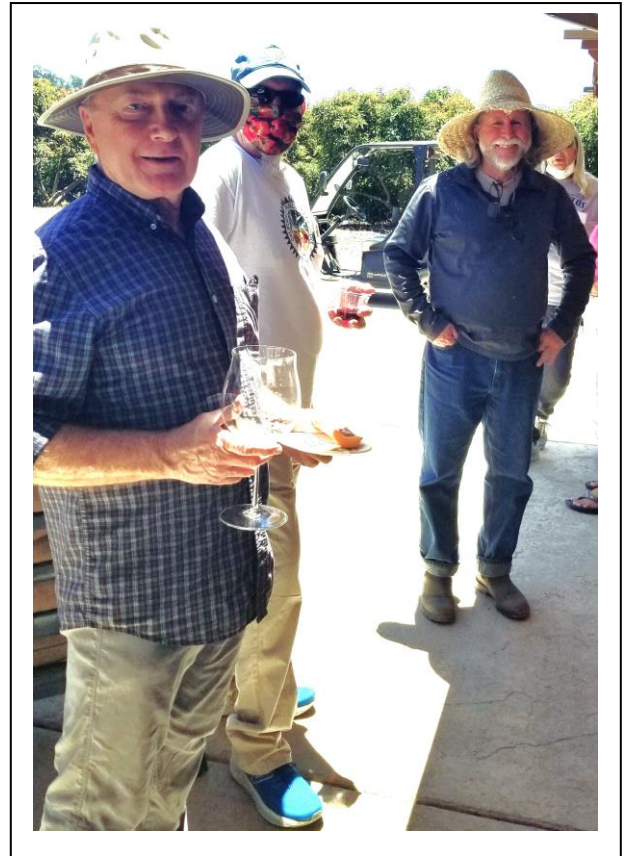
Editor's note:

Here is an excerpt from Wikipedia <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phylloxera>

Grape phylloxera are almost microscopic, pale yellow sap-sucking insects, related to aphids, feed on the roots and leaves of grapevines (depending on the phylloxera genetic strain). On *Vitis vinifera*, the resulting deformations on roots ("nodosities" and "tuberosities") and secondary fungal infections can girdle roots, gradually cutting off the flow of nutrients and water to the vine.[2] Nymphs also form protective galls on the undersides of grapevine leaves of some *Vitis* species and overwinter under the bark or on the vine roots; these leaf galls are typically only found on the leaves of American vines.

Unfortunately, there is currently no cure for phylloxera and unlike other

grape diseases such as powdery or downy mildew, there is no chemical control or response. The only successful means of controlling phylloxera has been the grafting of phylloxera-resistant American rootstock (usually hybrid varieties created from the *Vitis berlandieri*, *Vitis riparia* and *Vitis rupestris* species) to more susceptible European *vinifera* vines.[2]



*Left: CRFG-member Risa modeling her fancy fruit pants and enjoying a taste of the Hein's special blend wine called "Ghost" in a rather **large** European crystal glass. The crystal was impressive. You could tell by the long sustained note when you tapped on the glass.*

Above: Tom, Robert, and Mark enjoying snacks on the Hein's patio before the meeting.

Photos by Jenny



Seth opens meeting. Photo by Tim Hou





*The Heins had a comfortable patio for our meeting.
Photo by Tim Hou*



*Our host of Hein Ranch, Martin Hein shares his farming & winemaking experiences
Photo by Tim Hou*



*An oasis in the middle of the vineyard.
Photo by Tim Hou*



*Young avocado trees.
Photo by Tim Hou*



*Mature avocado trees.
Photo by Tim Hou*



*Grapevines planted close together.
Photo by Tim Hou*



*Mature avocado trees.
Photo by Tim Hou*

Forestiere Underground Gardens

by Dara Manker

<https://www.undergroundgardens.com/>

Imagine you are a young Sicilian immigrant in the early 1900s. You've just purchased 80 acres in Fresno with a life-long dream of planting your own citrus orchard. You jab your shovel into the ground, but... it goes nowhere. The ground below you is impervious to your shovel. The soil is hardpan: solid clay three to five feet deep and impermeable to water, air, and certainly roots. Above you, the Fresno sun is beating down, and the heat around you is unbearable.

What would you do?

Most people might give up, but not Baldassare Forestiere. Baldassare's life experiences uniquely prepared him to envisage an alternate future for his land that few others could imagine, much less implement.

Born in Sicily in 1879, Baldassare grew up tending his family's orchards. He dreamed of some day owning his own, but knew that as the second son his family's orchards would never pass down to him.



Manny checks out the trees and underground passageways at the Forestiere Underground Gardens.

With this dream in mind, he migrated to the US in 1901. His first job was digging the subway in Boston.

In 1904 he saw a newspaper advertisement extolling cheap farmland being sold out west, and he headed there. He paid \$10 for 80 acres, sight unseen, and then proceeded to explore his new property. That's when he found his soil was solid clay, and the Fresno heat was "burning his ears off."

But he remembered the coolness in the tunnels of the underground subway and the wine cellars in Sicily.



In 1906 he dug himself two rooms and an underground well, all ten feet below the surface. The rooms included a skylight, a hole in the ceiling that were narrower at the top than the bottom, allowing the Venturi effect to allow hot air to escape and cool air to enter.

Forestiere earned his money by leveling land and building canals for farmers, and in his spare time he continued to dig on his property. Most people at this time used dynamite to deal with the hardpan, but he used a shovel, pickaxe, and wheelbarrow. He used scrap metal obtained from old train tracks as reinforcement where needed.

Over the next 40 years, he single-handedly created a 20 acre maze of underground passages, courtyards, rooms, and even a grand ballroom. His underground home had a kitchen with stove and icebox, a fireplace, a bathtub with water heated by the sun above, a fish pond, an underground aquarium, a chapel, and even a sump hole into which water would drain during storms.



Forestiere's kitchen is complete with electricity, stove, and icebox. He would trade fruit for blocks of ice.



*After all that digging, a hot bath must have felt divine.
A pipe delivered water, heated by the sun, to his bathtub below.*

These tunnels would be reason enough to visit this historical site, but here's why as an avid fruit tree fan you might want to visit it in the future. Throughout his property, Forestiere planted a wide variety of fruit trees and grapes underground.

At a time when there were no nurseries from which to buy plants, Forestiere obtained his by trading with folks from different cultures in the area. Thus he obtained trees from around the world.



A jujube tree reaches toward the sun.

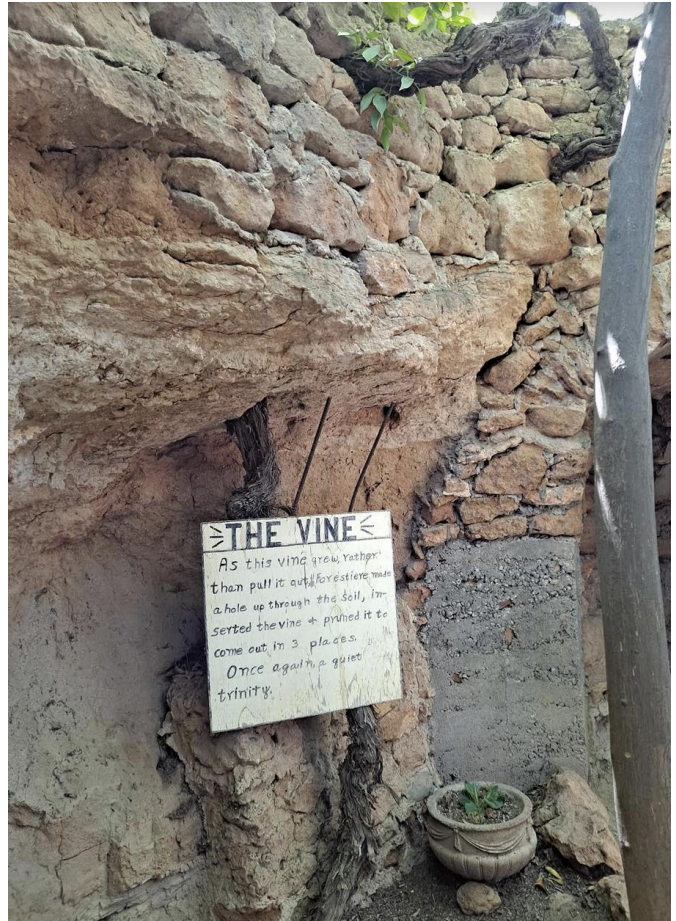
In courtyards ten and even twenty feet underground he planted lemons, jujube, carob, mulberry, quince, sour orange, grapefruit, pomegranates, kumquats, grapes, and more. He also planted them in underground rooms with skylights. The trees would grow up toward the sun on long, skinny trunks, and once reaching the surface would branch out and bear fruit. When he wanted fruit, he simply went above ground, and just reached out and picked the fruit which was at ground level.



The view from above: grapevines and tree tops poke out through the skylights and courtyards below. When Forestiere wanted fruit, he simply went up to ground level, reached over, and picked the fruit.



The trees have long, skinny trunks: they put their energy into growing up toward the sun, of which there is plenty in Fresno! The temperature outside the day we visited was 100F, while the caves below were a pleasant 75F.



Baldassare was creative, too. In some places he wound his grapevines through the underground walls so that he wouldn't have to pull them out as they grew bigger.



Ceramic fish simulate actual fish that once swam in Baldassare's underground aquarium. He installed glass below the water and stocked the pond. In the room below he enjoyed relaxing and admiring the fish and light above him.

Quotes From Baldassare:

“To make something with a lot of money, that is easy; but to make something out of nothing... now that is something!”

“The visions in my mind overwhelm me.”



Many other plants that Forestiere planted in the early 1900s are still alive today. This Black Moroccan grapevine is 100-115 years old.

He was no stranger to grafting. Many of the trees bear different types of fruit, including one that has seven grafts including cedro (citron), oranges, and grapefruit. This tree is still living, though it has lost some of its limbs over time. The cedro limb broke off due to the weight of the fruit which could reach seven pounds.



Forestiére planted this tree 2 floors down and grafted it with lemon, navel orange, grapefruit, sour orange, sweet lemon, Valencia orange, and cedro. The cedro branch (lowest on right) eventually broke off due to heavy fruit. As the tree grew, he built a catwalk so that he could pick the fruit from the first floor (see the supports for the catwalk in the background).

Baldassare had visions of creating a restaurant where the public could come to escape the heat. The guests would dine in the underground rooms, each room with a circular concrete table (made by himself) with a tree growing from the center as decoration.

Toward this effort he created an 800 ft. auto tunnel. He envisioned guests driving down the tunnel, getting out of their cars to go to the restaurant while valets parked their cars.

He was stopped from completing this vision by a hernia, then pneumonia to which he succumbed in 1946.

With no children to inherit the property, it passed to his six siblings. At the time, many people thought Forestiere and his underground tunnels to be very odd. Only one younger brother saw the beauty of the place. The other siblings sold their shares to developers who filled in the tunnels. Some of it was lost to eminent domain when the State put in highway 99.

Younger brother Giuseppe bought 10 acres with his share. Five of these acres have since been passed down to his son. The family understands the uniqueness of this place and worked hard to bring it to the attention of the public. This wasn't always easy as outsiders were keen to exploit it, as did one developer who advertised tours for "The Human Mole."

The family obtained a state landmark designation and reopened the gardens in 1973. You'll need a reservation which you can get by visiting their website. Currently the gardens are open from April through November, but the schedule can change so again, visit their website (see the top of this article for the URL).

When you tour the Forestiere Underground Gardens, you can't help but be amazed by the accomplishments of this one man, and also develop a profound respect for him as a visionary and artist.



Baldassare used his mules Molly & Dolly and a Fresno scraper (inspiration for the bulldozer) to move out the dirt out of the auto tunnel..



A picture of Baldassare in the background, along with the shovels, pickaxes, and wheelbarrows he used to excavate his land. If this doesn't make your back feel tired, I don't know what will.

SUGGESTED ARTICLES, VIDEOS AND LINKS

Are aphids covering your plants and creating a sticky mess and black sooty mold? Check out this video for ways to control the little buggers!

<https://www.groworganic.com/blogs/videos/getting-rid-of-aphids>

Fred Kenyon thought this was an important article about a new invasive pest, the spotted lanternfly found in the eastern USA. It's pretty, but we don't want it in California! It doesn't just feed on grapes. Here's an excerpt:

"The insect is detrimental to plant life and crops because it can damage and destroy grapes, apples, almonds, walnuts, cherries, hops, peaches and certain trees by directly feeding on them. The species also leaves behind a residue known as "honeydew" that aids in mold growth."

<https://thehill.com/news/state-watch/3517953-invasive-insect-may-threaten-californias-wine-grapes/>

Marv Daniels passed on an informative video presentation that Irene Davies, from CRFG San Francisco Chapter, sent out.

Irene said this about it:

"I received this email and link below about invasive plants in Hawaii, fruit flies, citrus greening disease, biological studies, and the ID apps for plant diseases/insects. The Citrus greening disease is close to the 56 minutes mark and the apps are at the end. You are welcome to share the link with others."

Here is the link to the mini-conference video recording

<https://vimeo.com/716264560/dd6a6214b4>