



Central Coast Chapter CRFG August 2021 Newsletter

by CRFG CC Chapter Members
Edited by Dara Manker



Paul Moyer came across this 20 year old picture of our CRFG Orchard. Recognize anyone?

Meeting Places Needed

Our chapter is in need of future meeting locations and/or speakers. Contact Alisha and/or Tucker if you would like to volunteer your place for a future meeting.

September CRFG Meeting

For September we had hoped to have Tom Del Hotal speak via Zoom about watering practices. Since he is not available, we will be doing one of the following instead:

1. Visiting Dean Harrell at the North Cuesta campus, if approved by the Cuesta administration.
2. If not approved, we'll be visiting Manny's backyard in Santa Maria.

The [website's calendar](#) will be updated with information as soon as we have it.

Some folks have expressed their concern about not being able to attend meetings due to Covid concerns. As your current newsletter editor, I, Dara, am doing my best to make sure the write-ups of our meetings are comprehensive and detailed so you will not miss out on any of our fun and educational events. You know your health concerns better than anyone! Please feel free to attend, or not; to wear a mask; to keep socially distanced; and know that we support you in your choices.

Articles Needed For The September Newsletter

Articles are still needed. Please contribute! The next newsletter's deadline is Sunday, September 19th, 2021. Please send your contributions to crfgccnewsletter@gmail.com.

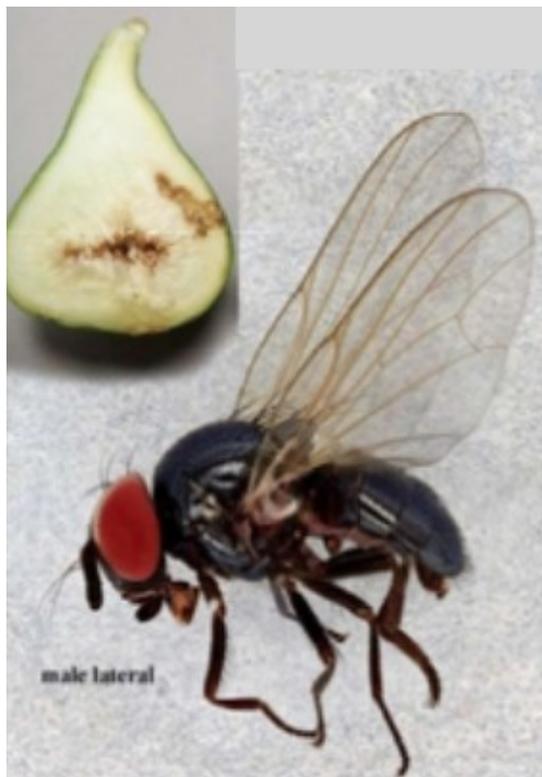
Update On The Black Fig Fly Pest

At our August meeting, Jenny discussed the Black Fig Fly, a 3.5mm long pest with huge red eyes that lays eggs in the hard green fruit. When the larvae hatches it eats the green fig, the fig drops off, useless for human consumption.

If you find any deformed, unripe figs, you can save the fruit in a sealed Ziploc bag and take it to the SLO County Ag Dept nearest to you.

You can also offer your fruit trees for insect traps. Just call your nearest Ag Department and ask for the Pest Detection staff. They can hang a trap in your yard. They will come check it every 2 weeks for about 6 weeks, and then move the trap. Or, you check the trap yourself, or take it in to the Ag Dept. to have it checked. You can also buy your own traps at a hardware store.

As far as we know, the closest this pest has been found is in Santa Barbara County. Major fig grower Harvey Correa reported finding it in the Sacramento Delta area. Jenny said there is no official detection program in our county because there is no large fig production here, so please help the Ag Department by inspecting your figs and by getting traps!



For more information about the Black Fig Fly, see the article Jenny wrote in the [July Leaflet](#), starting on page 3.

An "Approval To Trap In My Yard" form is posted on the SLO County's website:

<https://www.slocounty.ca.gov/Departments/Agriculture-Weights-and-Measures/All-Forms-Documents/Forms/Approval-to-Trap-in-my-Yard.pdf>

You can email the completed form to: agcommslo@co.slo.ca.us, or mail/take the completed form to your closest Ag. office:

Agriculture Department Offices in San Luis Obispo County:

Arroyo Grande Office
805 473-7090
810 West Branch St.

San Luis Obispo (Main Office)
805-781-5910
2156 Sierra Way

Templeton Office
805 434-5950
350 North Main

Tom Del Hotal Needs Your Help

Tom, an avid member of the San Diego CRFG chapter and our former guest speaker on pruning, recently moved to Washington State and found a scarcity of information on the varieties of fruit trees that will grow in the Olympic Peninsula.

He'd like to know which varieties work for you on the Central Coast.

Please let Tom know:

- Fruit Tree type (apple, fig, etc.)
- Variety
- Central Coast location (Arroyo Grande, Templeton, San Luis Obispo, Santa Maria, etc.) so he'll get an idea of your microclimate.



You can email him at fantasiagardens@gmail.com.

Here's the original email From Tom Del Hotal for those who'd like to read his request in full:

Please send my BEST WISHES to all my friends and fellow CRFGers and hope this drought and fire season will find them and their fruit trees all safe. Still working on our move, unpacking, home remodeling, planting new landscape and fruit trees etc. New challenges with a lot of shade, only seasonal sun area and lack of heat units for fruit trees.

I have a request.

I am hoping that you and the members of your chapters of CRFG would be willing to help me on a project that I am working on. I have relocated to the Olympic Peninsula in Washington state (now in Sequim, WA.) and am trying to compile a list of fruit trees that have potential for success in this area. The climate is very similar to the climate of San Francisco and the Bay Area and I was hoping that you and members of your chapters could help me by sharing what varieties and cultivars of fruit trees have worked in your area.

Our area is in USDA zone 8 and we get plenty of chill hours, however lack of heat units and a shorter growing season present a definite limitation to the success of some types and cultivars of fruit. The average rainfall is around 16-20 inches per year with almost all rain occurring between Sept and June. Mid June- Mid Sept rarely get any rain. Min temp in winter is usually 28-26 degrees although occasional temp into the low 20's or high teens is possible. Generally summer high temp are in the high 60's to low 70's with temp occasionally going higher for brief periods of time.

I have completed the Master Gardener program in our area and have discovered that there is a tremendous lack of knowledge about what varieties or cultivars and what types of fruit can be successfully grown in our area. I am being told that there is 1 peach variety (Frost) , 1 fig (Desert King- we need figs that will produce good briebe crops), but can find no one that has tried any of the apriums, plumcots, pluerries, or other interspecific stone fruit hybrids. Also virtually no one has information on plums, nectarines or apricots for this area. I have found no one that has tried pomegranate, persimmon, feijoa, loquat, jujube, mulberry, strawberry guava, che or other "rare fruit" in this area and I am hoping that you and members of your chapter can tell me what works for you in a climate that is similar to ours.

I have some of these trees that I am experimenting with, but being here only 1 year, my trees are very young and knowledge is quite limited. I have to believe that there are many cultivars or fruit types that will grow and produce fruit successfully in at least some of the areas and microclimates that we have here in my new location. I am hoping that you can help me compile a list of potential varieties of fruit for this area so that I can encourage others to try growing more than just 1 type of peach, apples and a few pears. I hope you will help and I look forward to your reply.

I am still VERY busy moving in, planting, working, etc. so please let all know that it may be a few days before I can reply to emails.

THANK YOU, Take Care and GOOD growing.

Sincerely,

Tom Del Hotal

Rat Trapping 101

Thank you, Elaine, for sharing this entry from the "Nextdoor" app:



Alton Szeto

Serra Park • 25 Jun 20



Roof Rats own the summer. Fyi Roof Rats are everywhere during the summer. There's a lot of food, fruit trees, nuts, warm weather, and new places to occupy and live.

If you're having a problem with roof rats, follow the county vector control guide to help make your home less desirable to occupy. you can also learn how to trap them to reduce their numbers. This is what I've learned over the years of trapping, hope it helps you.

Rat trapping 101. Follow every detail because if you don't, you will catch nothing.

1. WEAR GLOVES!!! I use new Vinyl gloves, Reason: because rats can detect the slightest human scent! if they smell you, you can forget about catching anything. They are SUPER SMART!

2. use wooden BIG snap traps. I've tried MANY other traps, and they just are not strong enough to catch Big roof rats that populate our community. Including electric traps, don't even bother, big rats walk through for fun and laugh at you.

https://www.amazon.com/Victor-Metal-Pedal-Trap-Pack/dp/B00VV8PNCU/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&qid=1542231429&sr=8-3&keywords=victor+rat+trap

In some cases, my trap kept going off and not catching the big rat. It was so big the snap wasn't strong enough, talking 10" (Body) rat size. Look on google ways to modify the spring tension and it'll kill for sure. It worked for me.

3. Screw it to your fence. wires are it's high ways to homes, fences are streets. See my picture on how I set it up. This is VERY important as it makes the Rat get in a downward position which makes it hard for it to escape when it has to fight gravity to bring it's head back out. They are FAST, putting it on the ground is like a play toy for roof rats.

My bait is closest to the top of the fence. I may set the whole unit down an 1" because it forces big rats into that downward position even more.

Notify your neighbors that where you set the traps, so they don't do work in their yard, trees, fence etc and put their hand into the trap.

Added bonus, it's safely out of reach for children!

Note: I've never caught squirrels or birds with my traps, maybe because they know what it does? or see the dead rats. but if it's an issue where it is killing birds, I recommend deactivating during the day, and reset it at night.

4. metal bait station. I use an old cloth strip and tie a small walnut on the metal bait station. Remember through out all of this, you must wear the vinyl gloves to cover your scent.

lastly smear Jiffy peanut butter on the cloth. Don't over do it. id use a tiny dab but really push it into the cloth so they have to bite really hard to get it. Pro tip, use Jiffy because the scent lasts for a LONG time. don't waste your organic PB, that scent only last a night. I learned this from professional trappers.

5. Lastly don't put too many traps out, they get suspicious and will not touch them. around our property I have 2 per fence side and it's worked great.

6. disposal: use gloves again, I use a long hook to unlatch the dead rats so I don't have to touch them. I use old long bbq thongs to grab and put into a zip lock bag and into the trash.

7. you can spray the trap off, if there's blood or scent of the rat on it. let it dry and just re apply a little pb for the next catch.

Frequency of catches for me:

Over the last 6 years I've caught hundreds. it's disgusting and I hate it, but if I don't do it. they'll just make their way into my attic or my neighbors.

I find that there is a spike when trees have fruit, lemons, apricots, nectarines, persimmons etc. I probably catch 1 per week. winter not so much. maybe every other.



Amazon.com : Victor Metal Pedal Rat Trap (Pack of 12) :...

amazon.com



In The Orchard

New Kiosk Roof Completed!



For years there has been one outstanding item on the Orchard's "To-Do" list on the [orchard's webpage](#):

- Fix kiosk roof. Orchard co-managers have replacement shingles.

Imagine our delight when Tom volunteered to do this task during our July Orchard Maintenance Day!



However, unbeknownst to Tom, this task was to grow in scope. In this parable (but in no other way) we can think of Tom as an innocent lamb frolicking in a meadow. As the sinister music cues up, some may notice that in the depths of the forest lurks the formidable specter of the wolf of scope creep.

Dara eyed the plywood and saw it was deteriorating around the edges. "It's not that bad," said another, kinder Orchard co-manager, known for his love of figs. But Dara persisted: "Yes, but if we don't replace it now, when are we ever going to do it?"

Tom agreed to replace the entire roof. On work day, Dara showed up with a sheet of leftover particle board, roofing paper, and the roofing tiles. The consensus quickly grew amongst the interested Chapter members that particle board would not do, so a sheet of plywood was procured from Home Depot.



As mentioned in the last newsletter, Tom had to cut the plywood at an angle on site by hand since Home Depot will not cut plywood at an angle. New metal edging was added. Because of the scope creep and the time consumed by the run to get lumber, the project could not be finished that day.

Tom returned on a different day to finish up the roof. New shingles and metal edging now grace its top and sides. Tom also has plans to reinforcing the 4x4 on the left side.

Thank you, Tom, for going above and beyond, and besting the specter of scope creep with skill and grace.

August 14th, 2021 Meeting

Tucker kicked off our meeting by welcoming our two new visitors. New visitors and those who renewed their subscriptions were rewarded with their choice of a new plant.

Announcements

Jenny reported on the Black Fig Fly. See page 2 of this newsletter for details.

Dara mentioned Tom Del Hotal's request for identifying fruit tree varieties that produce in our area. See page 3 of this newsletter for details.

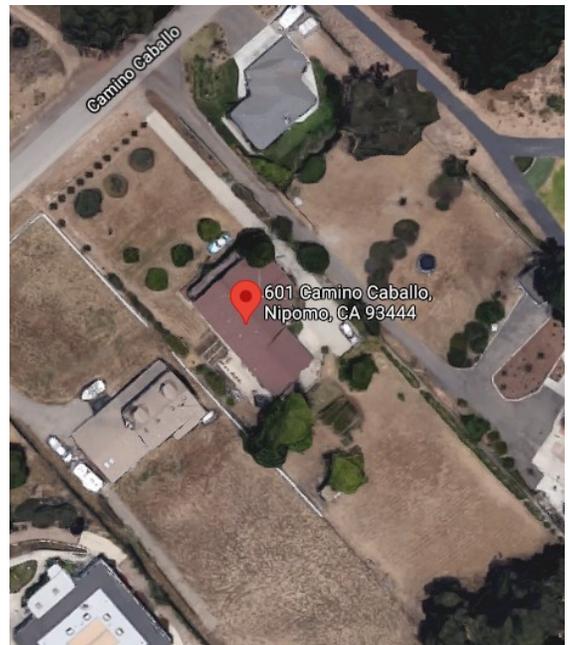
Residence of Seth and Keri McMillan & McMillan Farmstead Nursery



Approximately six years ago, Keri and Seth bought their Nipomo house on an acre of land. At the time Keri was curious about what they were going to do with an entire acre. Up until this point, their gardening experience had mainly consisted of raising vegetables.

The lot consisted mostly of sandy soil and weeds, but it did have a Valencia orange tree. One day Keri made orange juice from the Valencia's fruit. Seth tasted it and found it delicious. He asked her, "did you add sugar to this?" The answer was no. At that moment Seth was hooked. He wanted fresh fruit all twelve months of the year.

Keri signed Seth up for a CRFG membership. After attending his first meeting with the Central Coast chapter, she says, he was like a teenager who had just seen the Beatles. Now Seth spends as much time as he can outside with the plants.



The McMillan's property as it looked around the time they first purchased it.

We can think of their gently sloping property as having three sections: at the bottom is the front yard which is roughly 1/3 of an acre. Behind the front yard sits the house, and behind the house is roughly a half acre of land.

Aside from the house, their acre at that time was essentially a sandy dirt lot filled with weeds and an unlimited supply of Bermuda grass and gophers.



The front yard today.



Horse manure and drip line around a tree.

Gophers are caught with an old fashioned snap trap. One was caught the very morning of our meeting. The gophers are grateful for the artichokes grown on the McMillan Farmstead and eat his onions despite purportedly not having the tendency to do so.

The front yard contained a few oleanders, a lemon tree, and the now famous Valencia tree that started all the amazing work on this property. In order to build up the soil, suppress the weeds and reduce water use they hauled in four 40 yard roll-offs full of wood chips. Seth has found that horse manure around the base of his trees works well, even if it hasn't been composted.

No sprays, organic or otherwise, are used on the property. He says he'd rather lose a tree than disrupt the land's natural balance.

He follows his friend's motto, "If I'm watering it I'm going to eat it." Their front yard now is home to varieties of apricots, avocados, cherimoya, cherries, citrus, grapes, peaches, nectarines, sapote, and tomatoes.



Central Coast CRFGers peruse the McMillan's front yard.



This Popcorn Cassia delighted us with its popcorn scent, and butterflies with its yellow flowers. It has also been used as a cover or green manure crop in some locations.



Along the side fence grow berry vines, espaliered apples, and five varieties of grapes from cuttings obtained at our scion exchange.

Seth waters the front yard with a combination of water from the Nipomo Community Services District and grey water from showers, bathroom sinks, and the washing machine. All grey water is piped down the natural slope of the front yard to perforated 5-gallon buckets and allowed to leach into the soil. The house is on a raised foundation, so access to the pipes is relatively easy. In the crawl space below the house there's an easily accessible three-way valve that allows the water to either drain to the front yard or be diverted to the sewer lines if there are cleaning products not conducive to plant growth.

"Are you considering water retention systems?" asked his inquisitive audience.



Three-way valve allows diversion of water to either the front yard or the sewer system.



A perforated bucket allows the grey water to soak into the soil.

Seth did the math on rain barrels, and figured out the break even point was ten years, exactly the time the bins wear out. He also investigated IBC totes. Not only do they require a lot of space, the limited amount of water they would hold would run out by the end of May.

Drip irrigation around the trees is on timers, which he controls with an app on his phone. He uses in-line emitters 18" on center, looped around each tree. He mentioned that if he were to do it again, he'd use a spiral pattern as recommended by Tom de Hotal in his article (starts on page 9 of [last month's Leaflet](#)).

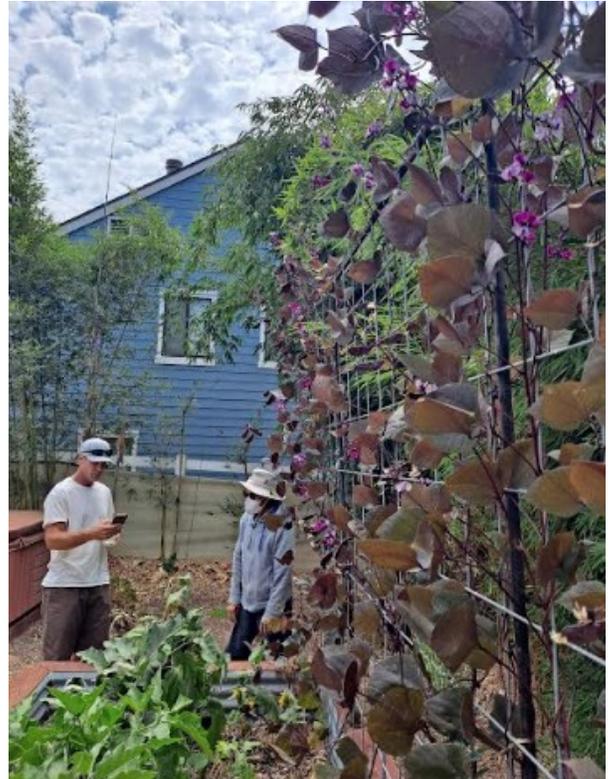
“How much water do the trees receive per week?” queried his audience. The smaller trees have approximately five emitters each. The emitters are 1 GPH and he usually waters once or twice a week due to the sandy soil, so each tree receives about 5 to 10 gallons per week.

The plants in the greenhouse are watered by hand. The total water bill averages around \$200 per month.

After visiting the front yard, we started heading up the property and around the house to the back yard. There are a number of plants by the house too, including tree tomatoes (tamarillos), eggplants, and bamboo.



Just in front of the house is a chicken coop filled with chickens named after characters from the game Clue.



This heirloom Scarlet Runner Bean captivated us with its beautiful purple flowers and leaves.



Just above the house are Hugelkultur mounds. These mounds are created by burying large logs; adding branches, wood chips and compost; and allowing them to decompose into a nutrient-rich, water-retentive soil perfect for raised-bed gardens.

Right behind the house is Seth's first greenhouse. You may have completely overlooked it during your visit because...



... in the backyard behind the Hügelskultur mounds there is a 1200 square foot greenhouse!



Seth's second greenhouse was built from a Tunnel Vision Hoops kit for \$7,000 which included the frame, end walls, plastic covering, doors, and rollup sides and shutters for ventilation. Seth added shade cloth and cloth to cover the floor. Additional shade cloth can be installed inside to protect sun-sensitive plants.



The nursery contains a plethora of plant types and varieties. They include bananas, cherimoyas, sapotes, paw paws, pineapples, jaboticabas, Jamaican cherries, eugenias such as surinam cherries, grumichamas, and cherries of the Rio Grande, and avocados (including rare varieties).

The plants in the greenhouse are raised off the floor and sit on cattle fencing purchased from Farm Supply. The fencing rests on pipes obtained from an old waterworks company, which rest on concrete blocks.

Seth uses Govee thermometer hygrometers to monitor the greenhouse's temperature and humidity. He monitors this data via his phone using the Govee Home app. It tracks changes in temperature and humidity, records the highs and lows, graphs the data, and will send out alerts if either gets out of a preset range.



One can scarcely reconcile the fact that all this effort is the work of just one person. If you missed the meeting, the next three pages should help give you an idea.



Avocados



Pineapples



Cherimoyas



Jamaican Cherries. "Delicious!" was the consensus of those fortunate enough to try them.



Macadamias



Jaboticaba sabara



Cherries Of The Rio Grande



Blue Jaboticaba



Surinam Cherries (with lemon grass in the background)



Red Hybrid Jaboticaba



Yellow Grumichamas, aka Brazilian Cherry



Feijoa aka Pineapple Guava



Entrance to the greenhouse, with banana trees in the far background.

Seth also has a science project in which we will be able to participate. He'd like to find a way to dwarf a sapote tree. An unpruned sapote tree will grow to 20-30 feet. If you've ever owned one you know that there is a narrow window between the fruit being deliciously ripe and fetidly rotten. Soft fruit dropping from that height creates a smelly, squishy mess below the canopy.

A tree with a naturally reduced height would be ideal. Seth says that there is a genetic incompatibility between yellow and white sapotes that he hopes to exploit to produce a dwarf tree.

Toward this effort, Seth has grafted yellow to white sapote rootstock, and white to yellow rootstock, and white to white via a yellow interstem.



Once the trees are a little older, it's our turn to participate. We can take some trees home, plant them, and report back on how they are growing. We'll tell Seth about our specific climate and soil type, whether or not the tree lived(!) and whether our tree(s) are dwarfed. Stay tuned! Seth will let us know when we can take part in furthering this experiment.

The McMillan Farmstead is now a licensed commercial nursery, and as such is regularly inspected. 90% of the plants are grown from local seeds, many obtained from our CRFG members.

The future of the McMillan Farmstead Nursery may include a grey water pond, and automatic overhead watering of plants in the greenhouse, espaliered apples, and pear trees.

If you are interested in visiting the nursery at 601 Camino Caballo Nipomo, please feel free to call or text Seth at (805) 714-5937 or email mcmillanfarmstead@gmail.com Follow them on Facebook and Instagram @mcmillanfarmstead.