



Central Coast Chapter CRFG

February 2022 Newsletter
by Newsletter Editor, Jenny Weaver
Technical Assistant, Tom Sheldon

Upcoming Meetings

March 2022 CRFG meeting to be determined

Announcements

March 10th, 10 am – 3 pm **Volunteers needed** at Cal Poly student event to set up, pot trees & teach apple tree grafting. Lunch provided!
Contact Sharon Lovelady for more details smlovelady2011@gmail.com

From Dean Harrell, plant science instructor at Cuesta College, North County Campus: **Cuesta College Plant Sale**

- **Many varieties of tomatoes, hot & mild peppers, eggplant, and herbs.**
- **Some house plants, succulents and landscape plants will be sold**
- **Plant pickup will be:**
 - **In Paso Robles on Friday April 8th and Saturday April 9th on the North County Campus**
 - **In SLO at campus on Saturday April 9th**
- **Link and online sales on jotform available in March. Stand by...**

January & February Mini Scion Exchange Reports

The Mini Scion Exchanges were a success! There were 4 exchanges altogether in late January and early February. CRFG wanted to provide people with different times and locations to get scions and some members were more than willing to host at their places. We've included reports below from Seth and Tucker and our observations of Robert and Carol's exchange.



Seth's Scion Exchange

Is this a new way to share?

By Seth, One of our Co-Chairs

January and February bring hope of the season to come and gets us gardeners out getting ready! One of the biggest tasks is winter pruning. This often results in lots of plant material to share with others so they can attempt grafting and growing something new.

It is also a great opportunity to share our experience growing that variety. The Central Coast CRFG annual Scion Exchange has historically been our largest event of the year. Unfortunately, the event was again cancelled or at least rethought this year. With health concerns and unpredictable mandates, it was decided to attempt a new way to share.

Our mission at the Central Coast CRFG remains the same; "Encourage and further public and scientific research, education, and preservation of plants worldwide that have edible seeds, fruit, leaves, stems, or roots." We want to encourage people to become and remain interested in growing these plants not just for themselves but for generations to come.



*Mini Scion Exchange at Seth McMillan's Farmstead
Photo by Seth*



*McMillan Farmstead Greenhouse
Photo by Seth*

The scion exchange is often the best way to engage the public and members in actually growing these worthwhile plants.

The alternative to the normally large and lively Scion Exchange event was to host smaller events. Keri and Tucker Schmidt, Carol and Robert Scott and myself decided to host scaled back exchanges at our residences. There was a member's only with "RSVP," members only, and a public event. Publicity was limited for the public event at our residence hoping to avoid potentially hundreds showing up and becoming unmanageable. Even still there were lots of people checking the website and noticed the exchange at our residence/nursery and contacted me.

We set up our event under a canopy on a beautiful Friday afternoon. We had bags and bags of scions from our orchard as well as those collected by Dara Manker at the CRFG orchard. Nell Wade and Gabrielle Robbains-Essig brought plant material as well and helped share their insights of varieties. Gabrielle brought some pistachio seedlings to share. We offered rootstock for sale and opened the nursery for people to shop to their hearts content. Proceeds from the rootstock will be donated to the CRFG scholarship fund.

We had about 30 people stop by during our event, some long time CRFGers, some from the general public, and others who have joined the CRFG in the past only to "get in early to the scion exchange." We heard many compliments on the small format of the exchange. I must admit it was nice to have a bit more personable experience and see that we could enjoy each other's company. Big thanks to Dara, Nell, and Gabrielle for helping out!



*Seth's Canopy Setup
Photo by Seth*

It is great to see that there is still a lot of interest in this type of event. I am reminded that we have unique access to plant material and growing knowledge and that sharing with other gardeners is essential. I believe each of us have a unique and valuable experience and that our level of comfort is also unique and valuable! I hope each of us can consider our impact on the mission of the CRFG and what we can do to help promote the CRFG mission. If you are interested in furthering the CRFG mission or would like to shape the future of the organization now is the time to get involved! We need folks to step up and help out on committees and provide input. I have no idea what the future holds but I am encouraged that our love of growing plants and love for each other is more contagious than anything.



*Some of the 30 people
who showed up
Photo by Seth*

Mini Scion Exchange at Tucker's

By Tucker

We had about 10 to 15 people show up. People really enjoyed the smallness of it. There were no more than 4 to 5 people at one time. It was very comfortable and safe. Robert and Carol Scott came near the end and packed up all the leftovers to add to their events the next weekend.



*Tucker's Canopy Setup
Photo by Tucker*



*Ronald B. and unknown masked woman at Tucker's scion exchange
Photo by Tucker*

Mini Scion Exchange at Robert and Carol's

By Jenny

Robert & Carol had 2 mini scion exchanges in their garden on Friday afternoon and Saturday morning. Some were "old timers" and others were new members to our CRFG Chapter.

The choices were not mini! There were lots of bags of scion wood on tables, chairs and in a wheel barrow! There was apple, apricot, cherry, peach, plum, persimmon, mulberry, grapes fig and miscellaneous scions.



*Robert and Carol's Scion Exchange
Standing in foreground: Robert, Mark, Patrick (new member), and Scott. Linda at the table. Tucker and Jenny in the background.*



Lots of scions on rustic display shelves



Jenny admiring Robert's fig grafts

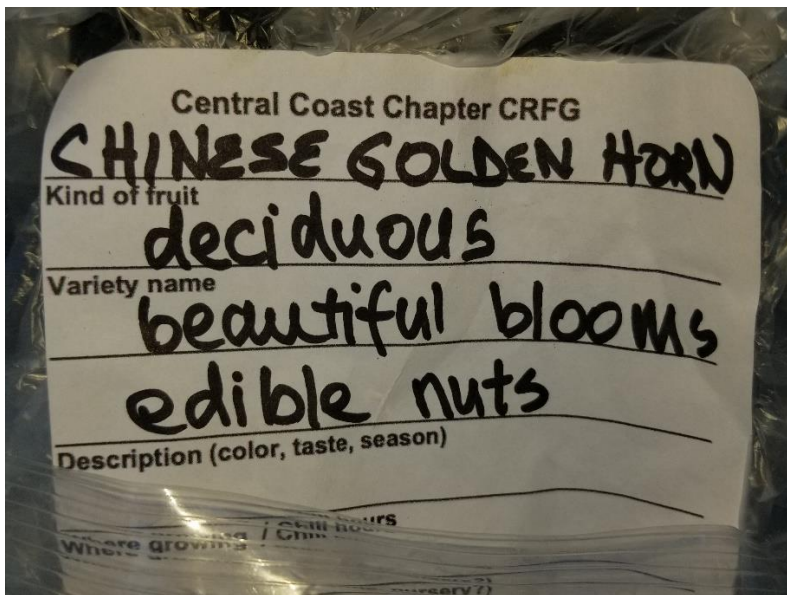


Plenty of choices

Overall, 35 people came to the exchange over the two days. Carol said people were grateful for the scion exchange and commented that it was nicer than the big, busy events at Cal Poly. She said next year she would rather have the exchange on just one day if she does it again. She also said that it would be good if some other people volunteered to host an exchange in San Luis Obispo and North County on different days. That way the remaining scions could be shared.

Robert took special requests from some members for avocado scion wood. He walked out to his orchard with them and selected the best scion and cut it on the spot.

One bag on display contained interesting scion wood and seeds from **Gabrielle**. They were Chinese Goldenhorn. Robert cracked open some of the pods and we snacked on the tasty innards (is it a seed, a nut, a fruit or all?). They were tasty and resembled small chestnuts. Carol described the extraction method as being time-consuming—"like getting pine nuts out of a cone".

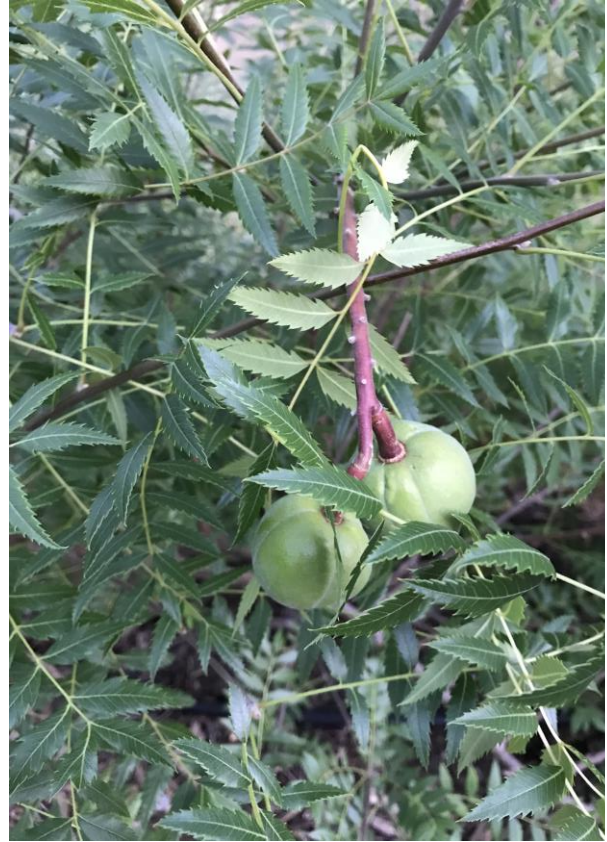


Chinese Goldenhorn (Xanthoceras sorbifolium), is also known as Chinese Flowering Chestnut, Flowering Yellowhorn Tree, Goldenhorn, Popcorn Shrub, Shiny Leaf Yellowhorn, and just Yellowhorn.

Gabrielle also said "It's a lot of work to eat it. I grow it in my yard in Solvang. It is easy to grow and quite a showstopper in the spring. It is definitely frost tolerant because we live on a hill and I have it in the lowest/coldest part of the yard. I cheated, I did not propagate it from seed. I purchased it at the Festival of Fruit in Santa Rosa."



*Chinese Goldenhorn in bloom in
Gabrielle's garden
Photo by Gabrielle*



*Immature Chinese Goldenhorn fruit
in Gabrielle's garden
Photo by Gabrielle*

To learn more about this truly rare fruit, check out these sites:

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/xanthoceras-sorbifolium/>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xanthoceras>

CRFG Orchard Update

By Dara one of the three orchard managers.

Despite being yet another Pandemic year, banner events occurred in the Orchard during 2021. In addition to the on-going general maintenance of fixing broken emitters and split drip lines, mowing, digging out invasive weeds, filling squirrel holes, fence repair, thinning fruit, and pruning, these were the major events.



Dara

July 10th Workday, Lunch, and Plant Exchange

One of the most exciting for our membership was July 10th, when we held our first in-person meeting since the Pandemic hit. We packed in a lot that day, starting with a big 3-hour work session in the Orchard. Weeds were hoed and suckers were removed. A huge dent was made in ousting the invasive fountain grasses establishing themselves in the back orchard rows. Metal fencing was installed around trees to keep them safe from voracious deer, and tree limbs were whitewashed to protect them from the sun.

We then had a delicious lunch from Lassen's of SLO bought for us by Alisha. This was followed by a plant exchange where we donated all those extra plants we'd grown during the pandemic. You can read all about that meeting and see pictures in the [July 2021 newsletter](#).

Bioreactor Built

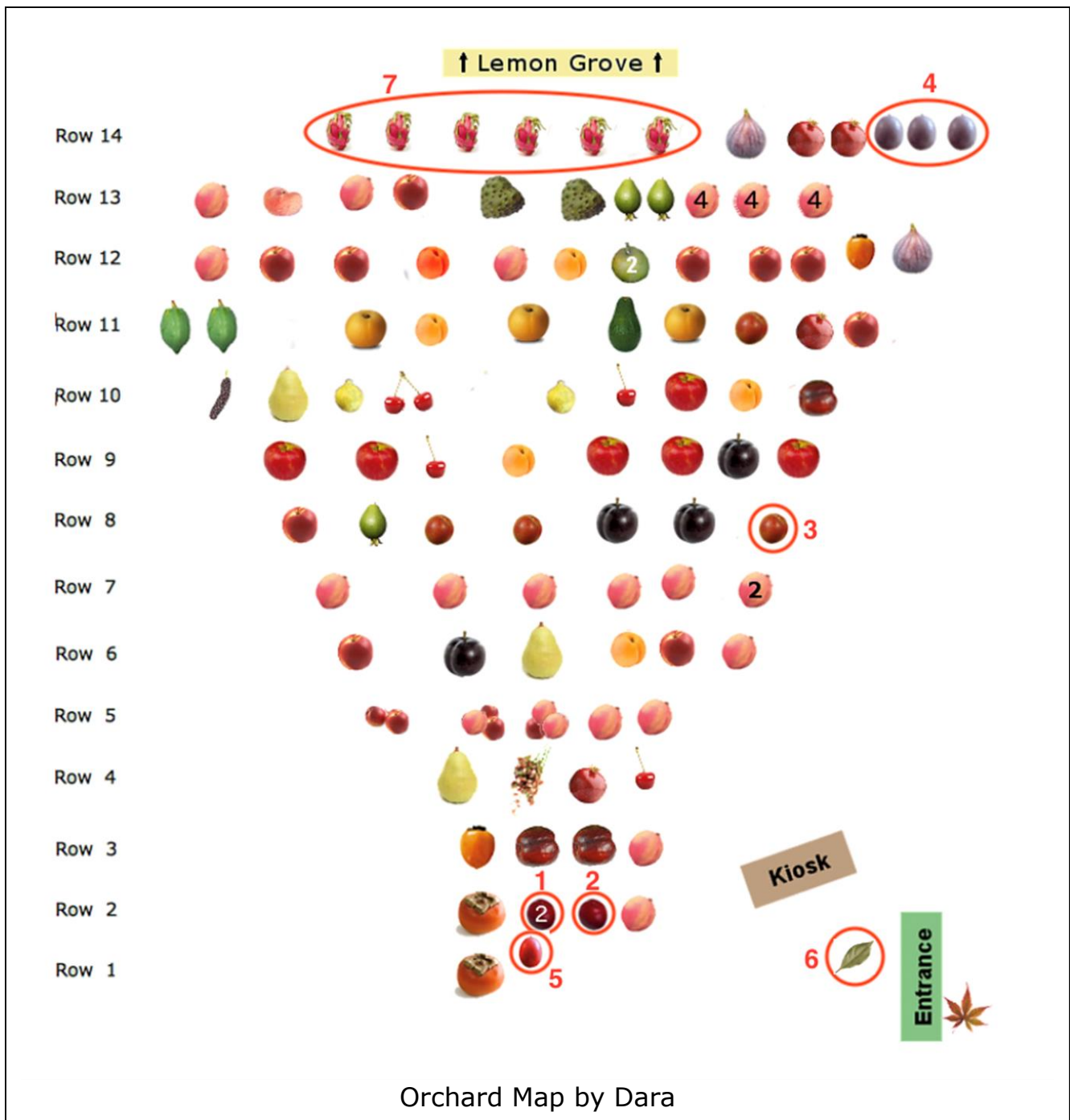
We built a bioreactor in late March after being inspired by Tim LaSalle's talk about Biologically Enhanced Agricultural Management (BEAM) during our February Zoom meeting. We filled it in April. Full details here: [May 2021 newsletter](#).

New Swing

Jesse hand-built a swing especially for the orchard, and he, Maggie, and Henry installed it in March. If you haven't already enjoyed this fun and comfortable addition to the orchard, you should stop by and try it. Jesse wrote an article of how he made the swing from oak wine barrel staves in the [April 2021 newsletter](#).

Theft

There was some sad news in February when thieves stole our orchard ladder, the apple-shaped CRFG gate sign, and our little red wagon. This was reported to the Cal Poly police. The items were never recovered. We now chain and lock up our new orchard ladder and our wheelbarrow.



Trees Removed

We had to remove these trees:

- Dapple Dandy Pluot in row 8 that was ridden with gummosis
- Plum of unknown variety in row 2 that never produced fruit
- Chojuro Asian Pear in row 11 that was sick

New Trees and Other Plants

1. Sprite Cherry-Plum with Delight Cherry-Plum graft, donated by **Richard Schmidt** and planted in February.
2. Delight Cherry-Plum donated by **Richard Schmidt** and planted in February. These two replace the plum of unknown variety in row 2.
3. Flavor Granade Pluot donated by **Jesse E** and planted in February. It replaces the Dapple Dandy Pluot in row 8.
4. 5 Passion Fruit donated by **Dixon Smith** and planted in row 14 along the back fence.
5. Tamarillo (aka tree tomato) donated by **Larry Hollis** and planted in row 2 in August.
6. A native California Bay Laurel tree near the Sycamore tree by the orchard entrance was identified and labeled by **Jenny Weaver** (for use in cooking).
7. Lots of Dragon Fruit donated by **Joe and Jesse** and planted in row 14 along the back fence throughout the year.

In addition, several grafts were made to the Sapote and Mulberry.



*On the left, cherimoya (front) and white sapote (rear) in the CRFG orchard
Photo by Dara*

Future Plans for the Orchard

We continue our process of gradually reducing the height of the trees so the fruit can be picked without a ladder. We're grafting new (to the orchard) varieties to existing healthy trees. We'll cut down the 5 peach and nectarine trees in the back of the orchard that rarely bear fruit to make way for trees that are less common.

If you're ever in the mood to spend some time outdoors in a beautiful, serene setting, drop by the Orchard and dig up some weeds, prune off dead wood, or just enjoy Jesse's swing.

CRFG Orchard Update

By Jesse

Editor's note: Jesse is one of the three orchard co-managers.

Yes, we've done lots of work!

- Grafted Coffee Cake persimmon scions to Fuyu and Hachiya persimmon trees
- Grafted Dapple Dandy to Flavor Grenade and Flavor Queen pluot trees. The scion wood came from my graft which I originally grafted using scion wood from the Dapple Dandy tree in the CRFG orchard that we had to cut down due to disease. Hoping the grafts take to bring it back.
- Grafted Minnie Royal to Royal Lee cherry to help improve cross pollination (thanks to Joe Sabol for recommending that last year)
- Planted several dragon fruit along the back fence (I believe these were donated by Joe Sabol)
- Lots of pruning!



Jesse...



*...and Maggie in a pear tree
Photo by Jesse*

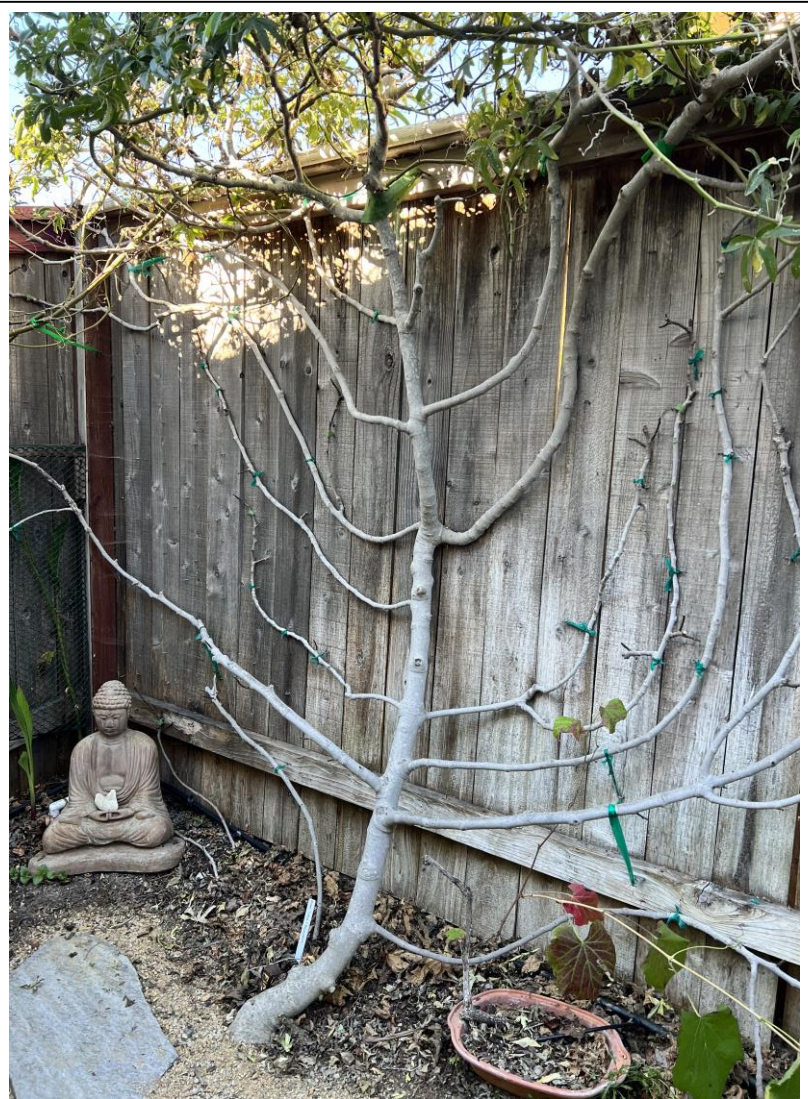
FIGS: FABULOUS, FLAVORFUL, FUN ...AND SOMETIMES FRUSTRATING

By Jenny Weaver

Figs (*Ficus carica*) are native to the Mediterranean and western Asia. The edible fig is one of the first plants that were cultivated by humans. Nine subfossil figs of a parthenocarpic (and therefore self-pollinating) type dating to about 9400–9200 BC were found in the early Neolithic villages of the Jordan Valley, a rich agricultural area through which the Jordan River flows (now Jordan). They have been around in California since 1769, when Spanish missionaries led by Junipero Serra brought the first figs to California. The Mission variety, which they cultivated, is still popular.

Fig trees grow well in all of San Luis Obispo County from the colder north county to the coastal areas. If you plan to grow figs, make sure you know which varieties require lots of heat in order to fruit and which prefer cooler weather to fruit.

I made the mistake of planting a Panachee (Striped Tiger) fig in Pismo Beach. It got lots of beautiful striped figs but they stayed rock hard and never ripened. After several years, I finally learned that Panachee need lots of heat to ripen. So I gave it to a CRFG CCC member over the Cuesta grade. I replaced it with an Osborne Prolific which I was told is a good bearer in cool weather by the coast.



Brown Turkey espaliered to a fence into candelabra shape. The narrow shape accommodates a path in my garden.

Photo by Jenny

This CRFG page talks about just *some* of the over 700 named fig varieties:

<https://crfg.org/wiki/fruit/fig/>

Another thing you need to learn if you plan to grow figs is whether they self-pollinate or need cross-pollination. Some figs require pollination by tiny wasps! There are four “types” of figs that have different uses requirements for pollination and fruit set. They are Caprifig, Smyrna Figs, San Pedro Figs and Common Figs. Read all about it here:

<https://homeguides.sfgate.com/types-figs-78199.html>

You can start your own fig tree easily from a cutting. There are lots of methods and everyone uses a method that gives them good results for their growing conditions. In mild Pismo Beach, I let them callous for a while in a bag in the fridge. Then when I take them outside, I dip them in rooting hormone with a fungicide. I use nitrile gloves and spread the rooting hormone on all the nodes except the few that will be above soil line. Then I put them in a pot with a loose potting mix and keep them moist in the shade until they have a few leaves. Then I move them into a sunnier spot.

There are lots of “How To Root Fig Cuttings” on good old YouTube.

Fig Espalier Methods

Another great feature of fig trees is that they are easy to *espalier*, which is a method of training tree branches to grow along a horizontal trellis or flat against a wall. Originally, the espalier method was used to train branches to grow against a brick or stone wall. A big benefit is that the masonry absorbed the sun's heat and allowed for quick ripening of fruit.



This Excel fig espalier did not have a central leader so I forced a lower branch up to become a central leader.

Photo by Jenny

Espalier is especially useful for small gardens or narrow spaces. I have 9 fig trees that are espaliered in two rows along a wire trellis held up by an occasional metal post. The rows are about 2 feet apart and just wide enough for me to fit between the rows!

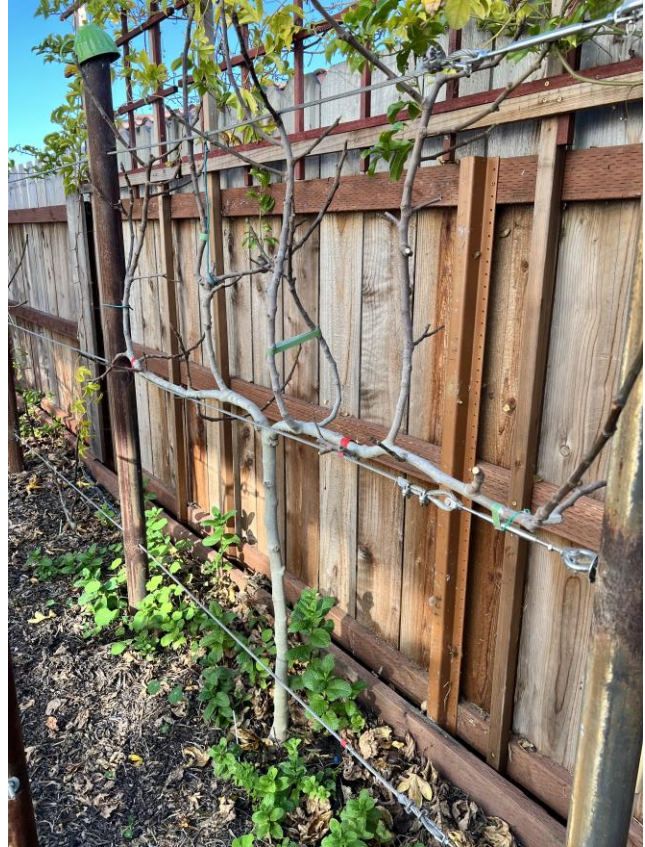
See Peaceful Valley's online site "Grow Organic" for a description of various espaliers. Figs, apples and pears are good candidates to espalier. This article has some great examples of espalier patterns. It's worth a look.

<https://www.groworganic.com/blogs/articles>

Grafting Figs Trees

You can also graft fig scions onto an established fig tree.

Robert Scott has 3 large established fig trees on which he has grafted many varieties. One scion grafted last year is already forming fruit on its many branches. A graft benefits from the existing tree's established root system.



This Brown Turkey espalier does not have any lower branches. I may try grafting some buds down below.

Photo by Jenny



Robert's graft from last year is already growing fruit in Feb.



Pictured at left is a recent graft by Robert. It is wrapped in Parafilm, which prevents scions from drying out. The buds eventually grow through the Parafilm.

Fig Frustrations

Fresh figs are hard to find in stores and usually limited to a few commercial varieties, so growing your own figs can be rewarding in many ways. But it can also be frustrating. Gophers, fruit flies, fungi (rusts & smuts), blights, bacteria, viruses and root knot nematodes can ruin your day!

To learn more about these microscopic fig pests, check out these websites:

<https://plantvillage.psu.edu/topics/fig/infos#!>

<https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/edible/fruits/figs/common-fig-tree-diseases.htm>

Gophers love fig roots! Be sure to plant small fig trees in wire gopher baskets or large pots. If you plant them in the ground, you've got to control the gophers. Take the time to trap or use other methods to keep them away. I've seen gophers kill a fig tree with a 3-inch trunk!

Black Fig Fly

Fig trees in South County are already developing a Breba Crop (a first crop that develops on last year's fruiting wood). Unfortunately, this makes them susceptible to a recently detected pest—the **Black Fig Fly**, or "**BFF**" for short. The BFF lays its eggs in unripe fig fruit.

In August 2021, I reported about the presence of this fly at the chapter meeting on Seth's property. At that time, it had only been found in Southern California counties as far north as Santa Barbara. UNTIL... I started looking at unripe fig fruit that had fallen from my own trees in Pismo Beach. So I brought several samples from my yard and the neighbor's yard into the Arroyo Grande office of the SLO Agriculture Department. UNFORTUNATELY, the figs were found to be infested with BFF larvae!!

In November 2021, an Inspector/ Biologist from SLO Agriculture Department told me the following:

"So far there are no biological controls, IPM info or new recommendations from California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA). The only management practice for BFF currently is getting rid of infested fruit"

"My best guess is that CDFA is finding that this pest is more widespread than expected and they're trying to figure out what the next step is. Just in

our county there have been positive finds in Arroyo Grande, San Luis Obispo, Nipomo and Los Osos.”

He also told me the best way to dispose of potentially infested fruit (unripe fruit on the ground) is to either grind it up in your sink disposal or bag it up and put it in the TRASH can.

DO NOT leave dropped fruit on the ground. DO NOT put them in your compost, worm bin or green waste can. The larvae can hatch and the adult flies can start the cycle again

Check here for more information:

https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/countyag/postings/files/Wilson_et_al_-_P.pdf

SPOTLIGHT ON OUR CHAPTER OFFICERS, BOARD & MEMBERS

This is an ongoing series. Tom Sheldon has been interviewing some of our officers so everyone can learn what committees they are on and what they are doing. He’s also interviewing members so everyone can share information about what they are growing, their soil, their location, their microclimate, and their successes and challenges.

Conversation with Mark Guy

By Tom Sheldon, December 2021

I found a moment to talk with Mark Guy at the holiday potluck and I am glad I did because his comments about grafting are appropriate for this issue.

Tom: So for the recording, you are Mark Guy and you’ve got a place in Orcutt..

Mark: Yeah, I’ve got a quarter acre. I joined CRFG about 5 or 6 years ago to learn how to graft and obtain root stock and scions.

Tom: How’s the grafting going?



Mark Guy

Mark: It's going really well. I've grafted most of the fruit trees in my back yard. I've got avocado, stone fruit, cherries, a few apples. Some citrus. I also have a garden with vegetables. And chickens.

Tom: Sounds good.

Mark: When we moved in, there wasn't much. There was a lime tree, an apricot tree that never fruited, and an avocado tree where the grafted variety had died off. But it had shoots coming out, so I grafted on to that. In the front yard, we were never going to let the kids play there, so I just put fruit trees in.

Tom: Your kids will benefit from those trees...

Mark: They do already. They just go out and help themselves.

Tom: What are you harvesting now?

Mark: Avocados! And citrus. They are doing well.

Tom: Any recommendations for what to grow out there?

Mark: Well, a surprising one is Royal Rainier Cherry. I thought the chill hours were not going to be high enough for it but its doing well. I have a Lapins cherry and Black Tartarian cherry grafted onto it...hand pollinated. You do have to hand pollinate it because there are no bees when it's blooming.

Tom: Good to know. Any problems?

Mark: Everything seems to be doing well. I'm trying to think what I might have a problem with-- nothing yet. We don't have a lot of heat, so it's a struggle to grow okra, bitter melon, and some tropical things.

Tom: Maybe you need a greenhouse.

Mark: That's on the bucket list!

SUGGESTED LINKS

Alisha, our Co-Chair wanted to share this article with you about Derek Mills who cuts up to 2,000 apple tree scions every year!

<https://www.growingproduce.com/fruits/all-hail-the-apple-scion-king/>

Chill hours are important to the fruit tree you plant! Learn which varieties are low chill and determine how many chill hours your location has on this Grow Organic site:

https://www.groworganic.com/blogs/articles/chill-hours-what-are-they-how-do-i-count-them-and-why-do-my-fruit-trees-car?_pos=2&_psq=chill%20hours&_ss=e&_v=1.0

Next Issue

A Pressing Project From Happy Valley Ranch

