

The Leaflett

California Rare Fruit Growers - Central Coast Chapter Newsletter
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2005--The Year of the Apple

Apple

Rosaceae—Malus

Antique Apples

Over **17,000** apple varieties have been recorded throughout history, yet today's shopper at the supermarket will rarely find more than a few varieties to choose from, such as Red Delicious, Golden Delicious, Macintosh, Fuji and Granny Smith. Why? Americans especially love to have many choices in food, so what has happened to all the other apples? Why aren't there dozens of types of apples piled in the produce section? The answers to those questions are simple--commercial growers don't want to grow most apples because they aren't the right shape for machines to pick or they don't ship well. Consumers at the grocery store won't buy them unless they look perfect. As a result, produce managers don't order anything that won't sell to a majority of customers. Now, almost all anyone can purchase at a grocery store is pretty, glossy fruit that ships well, stores well—and tastes bland. But, once **you** take a bite of one of the many varieties of antique apples available from smaller growers—or even from your own backyard—you will never be satisfied again with eating that “perfect” apple available at the supermarket.



Apples love to cross-pollinate and seedlings rarely have the same attributes as the parent tree, which is the reason for grafting—so they will stay true to type. When a seedling becomes an outstanding apple, it is carefully grafted onto other rootstock and, over time, is developed into a named variety. It doesn't take a botanist to propagate one, either! My personal favorite antique apple is the Rome Beauty (often shortened to just “Rome”) and it was grown by a boy!

In the fall of 1816, erstwhile shoemaker, Joel Gillett, moved his family from their interim home in Marietta, Ohio to the frontier of what would soon become Rome Township in Lawrence County, Ohio. While planning his new home, Joel decided to have an apple orchard on his property, so he took about 200 grafted fruit trees from the Putnam Nursery near Marietta with him during the move. In early May of 1817, he was ready to set out the orchard. According to historical literature,

Joel Gillette pulled off a root sprout from one of the trees and gave it to his 14-year-old son, Alanson, saying, “Here's a Democrat. You may have this one.” Alanson planted his sprout down by the river. (It is speculated it was a seedling of Westfield Seek-No-Further a red apple developed near Westfield, Massachusetts, around 1796.)

A few years later, Alanson's tree was producing such nice fruit that people began to take notice of "Gillette's seedling." The fruit was large, red, an excellent "keeper" and was delicious when baked or made into apple sauce. (It is considered by some to be too "mealy" for eating out of hand, but that has not been my experience with them!) Horatio Gillett, a cousin of Alanson's, was the first person to take a graft of that apple tree. Other farmers also began to take grafts of the tree. Horatio Gillett started a nursery and began to promote this "new" apple. In about 1830, a neighbor, George Walton, named the apple "Rome Beauty" in honor of Rome Township and the fine appearance of the fruit. After this, most of the orchards in southern Ohio contained the Rome Beauty apple. The original tree lived 40 years on a sandy knoll in a corner of a field near the Ohio River. It stood until the river bank caved in during a flood in 1856.

Rome Beauty is an antique apple that has stood the test of time and is quite readily available to buy—sometimes even in the produce section of the supermarket! There is one type of antique apple that will probably never make it to the supermarket produce bin and that is the Russet. There are a number of varieties of this apple, all having in common varying degrees of rough skin—some, such as the Knobbed Russet, being downright ugly! However, the Golden Russet, probably the best known of the group, is local CRFG member Robert Scott's favorite apple. He says there isn't an apple anywhere that tastes better!

The Golden Russet is of American origin, most likely a seedling of the English Russet, well-known in the 1800's and possibly originating in Burlington County, New Jersey in the 1700's. It was described by Downing in *Fruits and Fruit Trees of America* in 1859. A medium-size apple, its russet skin varies from grey-green to a golden bronze with a bright coppery-orange cheek. Grown under favorable conditions, the skin is quite smooth and the shape uniform. The fine-grained, yellowish flesh is crisp with exceptionally sugary juice. They should be left to hang on the tree as long as possible, until fully ripe. Properly stored (needs humidity to keep it from shriveling), it will keep over winter and is considered to be one of the best cider apples of all time, producing hard cider with a 7% alcohol content!



Are antique apples genetically better survivors? Near our mountain cabin in the Central Sierras stands an apple orchard with trees that are over 130 years old. These trees, despite lack of care, continue to bloom and produce tasty, if somewhat small, Arkansas Black apples, among others. The orchard was planted in 1877 by a man named Charlie E. Strivens, himself a transplant from Arkansas, which may be why he knew the variety. Arkansas Black originated in Arkansas about 1870, and is speculated to be a seedling of Winesap. Medium in size, the color is a bright red, deepening on the exposed side to a purplish red or nearly black. Flesh is yellowish, very hard and crisp, with a distinctive aromatic flavor. It is a long keeper that improves in storage. (This summer and fall I plan to do some work identifying these trees and then next February I will bring some scion wood from them to our annual scion exchange—scions of **real** antique apples!) Oddly, there aren't seedlings springing up all around the trees. The deer population keeps the unattended orchard properly mowed!

Of course, there are many tree nurseries around the country that specialize in growing antique apple trees to sell. (Nearby, you can find them at Trees of Antiquity in Paso Robles.) Locating an antique apple tree to plant in your backyard isn't necessarily a difficult task—choosing a single variety, though, is an almost overwhelming job! Perhaps because he just can't choose, Joe Sabol, one of our chapter's foremost apple proponents has a tree with 90 plus grafted apples—many of them of the antique variety. Joe doesn't suggest that you graft 90 scions to one tree, since the result isn't that attractive, but you could easily graft several varieties to one tree, especially if you have limited growing space. (The photo at the top of the following page is of Joe and his tree with the 30 new grafts he made this year marked by blue ribbon.)



If you can't wait long enough to produce an antique apple from a scion before deciding which tree you really want to grow, make a visit to an orchard specializing in antique apples where you can perform your own taste tests. One place you might go for tasting is to See Canyon, not far from San Luis Obispo. It is a virtual Mecca for antique apple lovers. There are several organic apple farms there, among which is Gopher Glen with a large selection of antique apples for you to try and buy. They guarantee that their Yellow Delicious is far superior to the one you might have purchased at your local grocery store. If you haven't done so already, give a See Canyon apple farm a try--then

you can decide which tree you want to give up valuable garden space to! While apples in general might not be considered "rare" fruit, a flavorful and crisp antique apple grown in your own orchard is certainly a "rarity" worth pursuing!

March Meeting

The March meeting set two records—one for the most people attending a "regular" meeting (112) and one for shortest business meeting! Held at the Arroyo Grande Mushroom Farm, our co-chair, Art DeKleine called the meeting to order and mentioned some brief business matters. He then introduced our chapter historian, Sandra Pirghaibi, who showed the new scrapbooks she has produced to record our meetings and events.



(Sandra is a fantastic organizer! When you see her, be sure to personally thank her for the outstanding job she has done on those scrap books.) After singing *Happy Birthday* to Joe Sabol, the eager crowd followed the mushroom farm general manager, Art Lopez, as he began the tour.



Monterey Mushrooms is the largest grower/shipper and marketer of fresh mushrooms in the United States. Established in 1971 in Watsonville, California as a single farm operation, Monterey has grown to an international, multi-facility company. Art said that while the Arroyo Grande facility is one of the smallest, it is the most productive.

The first stop on our tour was the compost pile and a view of the machinery which aerates the pile. Straw bedding from horse farms, or baled straw, protein meal, gypsum and water are mixed together and kept outdoors where natural biochemical reactions convert the mixture into the primary food source for the mushrooms.

Next was a visit to the compost sterilizing room. The fresh compost is mixed with vegetable oil and water and then compacted into wooden trays. The compost filled trays are placed into the sterilizing room and are pasteurized to free them of weeds, molds and insects. The compost is then cooled

down to room temperature so that the mushroom spawn can be added. (This process requires six (6) days to accomplish.)

We then moved on to see how the sterilized compost is seeded and cured. Mushroom spawn is evenly distributed over the trays, then a mixture of peat moss, limestone, and water is applied to the top of the tray. The spawn starts to grow in the mixture and in a few days carefully controlled environmental changes bring about fruiting or "pinning".

We visited several of the rooms where the mushrooms are grown. Each compost batch can produce 3 or 4 pickings (over about 28 days) and each picking takes about 4 to 5 days. According to Mr. Lopez, the ideal Portabella mushroom is about 8" in diameter. Open mushrooms taste better than less mature mushrooms, so it is important to have good "pickers."

Our last stop was at the packing plant where the harvested mushrooms are immediately placed in a cooler, chilled, then packed in a film-wrapped container or bulk boxes and moved into the finished product cooler. The cooled, packaged mushrooms are then placed in refrigerated trucks and delivered to the markets within 24-48 hours of harvest.

We were then given a mushroom to take home and taste. Those who had brought a pick-up or trailer for hauling were also given a load of wonderful, smelly compost! Art Lopez made the tour interesting and informative. He answered our many questions with great patience, repeating each question loudly for all to hear before beginning his answer, and the fact that he likes his job was obvious! (Thanks to Paul Moyer for the great photos of this meeting.)



Ask An Expert

Question: Help! The ants are taking over my garden. Is there any safe (non-toxic) way to get rid of them? (The spray I used doesn't work for long anyway!)

Answer: Next to gophers, ants are the major nuisance in our garden, too. They "farm" aphids and scale on many of our plants. We have smashed, sprayed and poisoned ant hills without any long term effect. So when a workshop on Ant Entomology was offered at the **Festival Of Fruit** in Riverside, I checked it out. I learned that a liquid bait delivery system made from PVC pipe and filled with water, sugar and boric acid would work in eliminating the ants and their nests without harming beneficial insects. We have made and tested several bait stations and placed them where we had an ant problem. It takes a while for the ants to start taking the bait back to their nest, but in a short time, we see that they are gone and it seems to work long-term.



BAIT STATION: Take 1" PVC cut into 6" lengths and drill a 1/4" hole in the center (at 3"). Drill two 3/16" holes at 3/4" center on both sides of center hole. The holes should be in a straight row on the pipe.

BAIT SOLUTION: 32 oz. warm water, 9 oz. sugar (dissolved in water), and 1 teaspoon boric acid (we make a batch and store extra in a 1/2 gal. bottle). Place a 1" PVC end cap on one end. Cover the holes with one hand and

fill pipe with bait liquid, tap on other end cap and place, with the holes up, wherever you have ants. Replenish with new bait as needed. Good luck! **Robert and Carol Scott**

High School Apple Grafting Report

Another successful grafting season is behind our fantastic apple grafting team! After seven years, the program is growing stronger and is still as well received by the students (and their teachers!) as ever. With all the grafting done, only a single incident involving blood was experienced. (Fortunately, it wasn't too bad, not requiring any stitches. No knives were lost, either.)

This year, the following high schools participated: SLO, Atascadero, Templeton, Shandon, Paso Robles, Soledad, King City, Coast Union, Morro Bay, Nipomo, Righetti, Lompoc, and Santa Ynez. Three other schools, Grizzly Academy, Bradley Elementary, and Lillian Larson Middle school in San Miguel also took part. We had many new and returning volunteers, with a record number of 16 volunteer assisting at the Grizzly Academy event! Once again, we were able to



use the Cal Poly Ag Ed van for the apple grafting season. We greatly appreciate this significant contribution to the apple grafting project! (The photo above is of the grafting class and some of our many volunteers at Soledad High School. See **all** those smiles? **Everyone** has a good time!) The "numbers" are great this year—how many people volunteered to help, how many schools participated, how many trees were grafted, how many miles driven—but nothing speaks better about the real heart of this program than the following note written to Joe Sabol, our grafting team coordinator, by Debbie Lauridsen, a teacher at Paso Robles High School.

"Dr. Joe...

On Wednesday, you taught:

- 1. a student whose parents have been trying to sue the school for not providing enough "special" services...but after months of outside observations, the evidence is proving differently*
- 2. a student who has been in class 3 days since Christmas, supposedly he has been in Mexico where his grandfather died*
- 3. a student who is on the brink of being kicked out of school, but occasionally wanders up to ask the teacher questions about Life*
- 4. a student who stole the Para educator's wallet and had to be dealt with by the teacher, instead of getting the shade house completely "pretty" for guests from RFTG... she is getting counseling for a problem with a history*
- 5. a student who was moved to California from Colorado and has hated school since the fall...but is finally starting to turn around*
- 6. a student who is so very quiet, but works hard...that the teacher is trying to get involved in growing and selling the "product of her toil"*
- 7. two very smart students*
- 8. a student whose humor is always right on the line...and the teacher is trying to keep it on the "right" side of the line*
- 9. 3 students who speak a different language, who work hard, and are learning to trust,*
- 10. 2 freshmen who capitalize, and triple the number, of "m's" in the middle of "immature"*

*Two students missed out!
One is testing the boundaries of school authority...the other, the law.*

They are all great kids...and they loved your lesson! Amazing what it takes to impress a group of teenagers...I bet they never thought they'd graft an apple tree!

You didn't just graft a tree this day; you planted a seed in some kids' hearts and minds!

You are impressive!!!"

As Joe says, "Any teacher could have written this letter. The bottom line...what we are doing is making a difference. Let's keep this apple grafting project going!! Thank YOU for your dedication!!!"

Announcements

Welcome New Chapter Members: James Guse and Ben & Jackie Parker.

4th Annual Central Coast Greenhouse Growers Association Tour: Saturday, April 23, 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM. **Call 934-2496 or 1-800-961-8901** for more information on this wonderful tour of local wholesale nurseries. You can shop 'til you drop—taking advantage of products at prices normally not available to the public. As Joe Sabol says, *"Go to the bank first and remove 45% of all your savings, rent a U-Haul truck/trailer, and then go shopping! Remember, you have never seen a U-Haul trailer hooked to a hearse. That means you cannot take it with you!"* A delicious and reasonably priced BBQ will be available at All Seasons Nursery so you really won't drop from lack of nourishment!

Bird Netting: Our chapter has just placed a large order (half-a-mile!) for fantastic green bird net. It should arrive in May and be for sale during the May meeting at the bargain price of 50 cents a running foot. It is 16' 4" wide excellent quality net with a 10-year warranty!! You may purchase any length you want as we will "cut to order." Several of our members are constructing permanent structures to hold the net over their trees.

Web Site: Check our site at: www.crfg-central.org to see what our web-master, Art DeKleine and his assistants, John and Choung Crowe and Pet and Marv Daniels 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**

Calendar of Meetings – 2005

Meetings are held the **second Saturday** of the month and begin at **1:30 PM** unless otherwise indicated. Bring a friend, think about car pooling, and, for most meetings, **bring a chair** for all in your party. What fun it is to be a member of CRFG!

April 9: Earth-Wise, Inc.—1:30 P.M. This is a company devoted to promoting healthy soils through the use of compost and compost teas. Ted Peterson, owner, will be our speaker. He designs and builds tea "brewers" for a wide variety of applications. His customers include Morro Bay Wastewater, Wild Horse Winery and the City of San Luis Obispo. Jerie Garbutt, our own CRFG member, is

responsible for lining up Ted Peterson for this meeting to be held at **Camp Sticky Monkey in Los Osos**, which is at **60 Costa Azul Drive**. Take **Los Osos Valley Road** west from **Highway 101** (north or south), traveling through the town of Los Osos and going toward Montana de Oro Park (11.3 miles). Los Osos Valley Road becomes Pecho Valley Road. Take Pecho Valley Road to Costa Azul Drive (.7 miles) and turn right. Watch for our CRFG signs. By-the-way, if you need further enticement to attend this meeting, Paul Rhys will be there with the giant pumpkin seeds he promised to give to those of you who attended the October meeting at his farm. We will also be discussing the possibility of renting a bus for the May 14th trip to Kern County. If this is something you are interested in, **bring your checkbook** to reserve your spot on the bus! **Refreshments: H - R please.**

May 14: Kern County --All-Day Trip to the Southern San Joaquin Valley, possibly by bus. At our May CRFG Meeting, we will visit two diversified fruit growers, Steve Murray in Arvin and Walter Thoma in Porterville. Steve has over 150 varieties of fruit trees and should have more than a dozen varieties of cherries ripe for our tasting in May! He and his family have an upscale fruit stand with a picnic area for our lunch. After lunch we drive to Walter and Brenda's home to see his fantastic



greenhouses and fully netted fruit trees. His orchard includes many trees that are espaliered and are multiple variety trees! He has over 100 varieties of apples under the bird net! Walter loves to grow nearly all of his own food, is an excellent grafter, and is an active member of his local CRFG Chapter. Please mark your calendar and join us on what will be a very memorable trip to the richest agricultural valley in the world. (The photo on the left shows Walter and Brenda Thoma and their bird-netted orchard. It is a "teaser" and was taken by Joe Sabol on the "pre-trip" he and his wife, Jill, took in preparation for our "big group trip" on May 14.)

June 11--Setting up a Drip Irrigation System—Farm Supply—SLO—1:30 P.M.--Mr. Joe Decker, Farm Supply, will be our speaker and host. Meeting will be at the new Farm Supply store on Tank Farm Road. Directions will follow later. Thanks to Jerie Garbutt for suggesting this program!
Refreshments: S - Z please.