

### November CRFG Meeting

Our November meeting was held at "My Blue Heaven," Roxy and Don James' blueberry farm in rural Arroyo Grande. Story starts on page 5.

### December Holiday Meeting

**Saturday, December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

**Location:** [SLO Grange, 2880 Broad St, San Luis Obispo, CA](#)

**Time:**

- **Gathering, bring in plants and dishes: 12 pm**
- **Lunch Starts: 1 pm**
- **Speaker: 1:30 pm**

**Bring:** a dish to share, plants to share, and lots of dollar bills to buy tickets for the plant drawings. The money goes in part to scholarships for Cal Poly Fruit Science students.

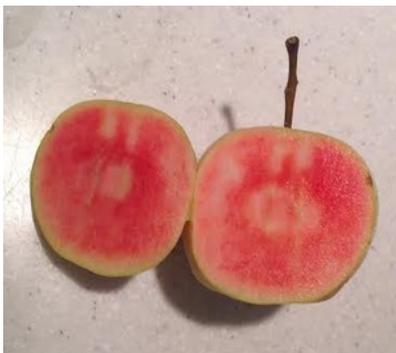
**We are meeting at a different location this year.** PG&E is only allowing their Ontario Road facility to be used by employees, so Alisha is booking the Grange for us in San Luis Obispo.

**Please check the website and your email prior to this event** in case there are changes to these plans. After all, you never know what is going to happen next during this COVID Pandemic.



*Blueberries at "My Blue Heaven" blueberry farm growing in what is typically the off-season.*

*Photo by Dr. Barry Dorfman.*



### Thornberry apple grown in Sunset Palisades

Marv Daniels sent in this picture of the beautiful Thornberry apple he grew at his home in the Shell Beach area. Marv says the apple is "sweet, firm, juicy, and small to medium size."

## Upcoming Elections

Alisha reminded everyone that the board member election for our Chapter will be held in December, and we are looking for volunteers for 2022.

Please consider volunteering during 2022. We will need at least one new co-chair, a newsletter editor, and a group of program coordinators to find locations for meetings and follow up with potential hosts. As a program coordinator you can directly affect what we see, where we go, and what we learn!

Don't be shy if you are new to the Chapter or think you don't know much about fruit trees. That's not a requirement to volunteer: you just need a willingness to help. Here is the list of the 2021 volunteers:

## Chapter Officers

**Co-Chairs:** Alisha Taff and Tucker Schmidt

**Secretary:** Linda Robertson

**Treasurer:** Dick Pottratz

## Board Members

**Program Committee:** Joe Sabol, Chair; Larry Hollis, Elaine Rathbun, Art DeKleine, Nell Wade, Roger Eberhardt, Jim Ritterbush

**State CRFG Liaison:** Joe Sabol

**Apple Grafting Coordinators:** Joe Sabol, Marvin Daniels

**Christmas Party Venue:** Marv Daniels

**Demonstration Orchard Co-Managers:** Manny Magaña, Jesse Englert, Dara Manker

**Hospitality Committee:** Evelyn Ruehr, Chair; Karen Kolba, Eliane Rathbun

**Master Gardeners Liaison:** Linda Robertson

**Membership, Info. Coordinators:** Choung Crowe, Gloria DeKleine, Maureen and Pat Moudakis

**Newsletter Editor:** Dara Manker

**Nominating Committee:** Larry Hollis, Chair; Lark Carter, Art DeKleine

**Photographer:** Joe Sabol

**Pruning Resource Consultant:** Marv Daniels

**Publicity:** Joe Sabol

**Raffle Coordinators:** Kathy Longacre, Nell Wade

**Scholarship Program:** Lauren Garner, Chair; Joe Sabol, Marv and Pet Daniels, Dave Christie, Nell Wade, Karen Kolba, Tucker Schmidt

**Scion Exchange Co-Chairs:** Carol and Robert Scott

**Scion Exchange Store-Supplies Chair:** Roxy James

**Scion Exchange Root Stock & Graft Chair:** Nell Wade

**Secretary:** Linda Robertson

**Webmaster:** Dara Manker

**Board of Directors:** The above listed officers and Committee Chairs plus:  
Lark Carter, John Crowe, Les Ferreira, Nancy Lehman, David Maislen,  
Jim Ritterbush, Gabriella Robbins, Bob Tullock, Jenny Weaver

## Mighty Cap Mushroom Taste Reviews

As you know, our October meeting was held at "Mighty Cap Mushrooms" in Paso Robles. In response to the writeup in the October newsletter, Karen sent the following inquiry:

*What a great story about the mushrooms!  
This was almost as good as being there! Thanks for all the time to write and edit and include the photos. All that was missing was the taste reviews of the folks who purchased mushrooms that day. Maybe next time?*

I sent an email to attendees who had bought the mushrooms. Our responses follow:

*I sauteed mine in butter and olive oil for Manny's family. They were delicious, and gone in no time flat. While they didn't last long, they did lead to fascinating and hilarious stories of mushroom hunting! I'd cook them differently if I were to do it again. In my opinion the butter took over. While I could tell the texture of some of the mushrooms was more chewy than the button mushrooms you get at the store (which was a plus), the flavor difference was difficult to distinguish. I tried the Spoon Trade's "Mushroom and Goat Cheese Cannelloni" (which is made with MGM's mushrooms) to see how they taste when the professionals get a hold of them. They were soooooo delicious!*  
Dara Manker

*The mushrooms we purchased were mostly the Oyster variety. I caramelized them with some butter, olive oil and vermouth. They caramelized quickly due to lower moisture content than button mushrooms. The flavor was good, but not as strong a mushroomy flavor as Morel or Shiitake mushrooms.*  
Anonymous

*I cooked them that night. I sauteed them with some shallots, then hit them with little Marsala and butter at the end. Put them on brioche toast with a poached egg and parsley on top. SO DELICIOUS!*  
Teresa Polito

*I fried half of them with a little butter, minced garlic and white vermouth. They were delicious. The remainder went into a mushroom stroganoff dinner I threw together served over pasta.*  
David Maislen

*With the black pearl mushrooms, I made a mushroom pilaf with farro, They were very meaty tasting. With the Italian Brown, I sautéed the mushrooms with onions and garlic in butter put it over homemade pasta, tasty but mild flavor. With the leftovers the next day I threw in 1 and 1/2 cups of leftover roasted squash soup as the sauce and it was great. The pasta and sauce more than the mushrooms.*  
Carol Scott



## November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2021 Meeting "My Blueberry Heaven" Blueberry Farm



We gathered at Roxy and Don James' beautiful home and the location of their "My Blue Heaven" blueberry farm in rural Arroyo Grande. The day was a hot one for November. Don said the thermometer earlier in the day read 110 in the sun and 95 in the shade. But we were very comfortable lounging on our folding chairs on the lawn in the shade of their house.



What a relaxing and delightful way to spend the afternoon: learning about blueberries, amused by Roxy's funny stories; eating snacks; being entertained by the chickens' antics; and repeatedly welcomed by Holly the Golden Retriever whose people skills are beyond those attainable by mere human beings.

*"You caaan't have it!" Chickens play keep-away with the ultimate prize: the liner of a delicious muffin.*



*Homemade muffins and lemonade made by Roxy, and coffee made by Evelyn.*



*Myron brought homegrown Tiger figs and feijoas*

First, the snacks. We haven't had a lot of them during the meetings we've been able to hold during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Our hostess made lemonade and baked homemade muffins, and they were delicious.

Evelyn made coffee, which had been sorely missed by many.

Myron Heavin brought Panache (aka Tiger) figs and Feijoa guavas all the way from his garden at his Lompoc home.



*Alisha discusses the need for members to volunteer for positions in the upcoming election.*



*Photo by Dr. Barry Dorfman.*

Alisha kicked things off by welcoming everyone to the meeting.

She inquired about what the attendees thought of having our December meeting at the SLO Grange. Response was enthusiastic.

Alisha also discussed next month's annual Chapter elections for officer and board positions. You are urged to step up to volunteer for any position that catches your fancy. See page 2 above for details.

Don't be a chicken! Even though it means you could be as lovely as this lady on the left. Please volunteer for Chapter positions.

Roxy commenced relating the story of “My Blueberry Heaven” by telling us that she and Don had been city folk, moving here from Mission Viejo in 2008. While their friends were downsizing by moving into condos and homes with less land, Roxy knew she was happiest when being outside, playing in the dirt. As CRFG members can relate, it makes her feel grounded, at peace.

They found their house in rural Arroyo Grande with 400 blueberry bushes planted on the slope below the house. It's a beautiful property in a lovely location, and they purchased it.



The field below their house had been used as a motocross race track by the previous owners, but four months before putting it up for sale, the owners planted the blueberry bushes to make the house more salable. Problem was, they just plopped the bushes into the ground sans amendments nor any other soil preparation.

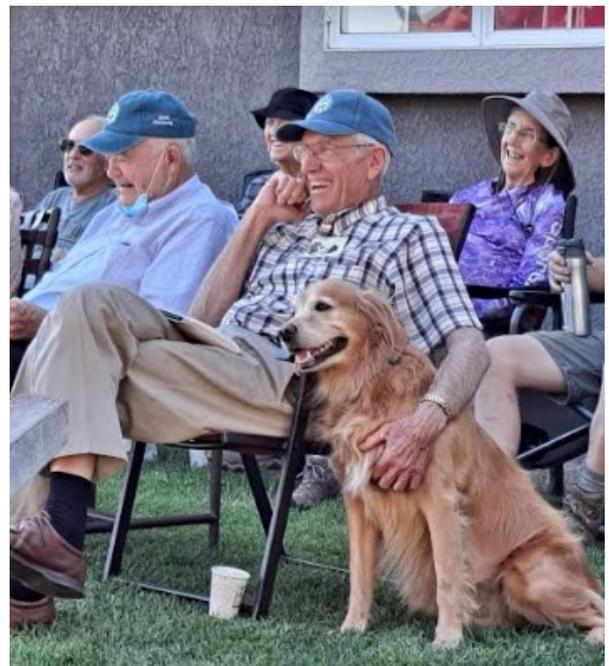
You can't just put blueberry bushes in the ground, says Roxy. For blueberry plants, “no soil is ever good enough.” They want acidic soil with a pH around 4.5 – 5.5. Roxy and Don use soil amendments and fertilizers to lower the pH. They amend their soil with 1/3 peat moss, 1/3 wood chips, and 1/3 sandy soil from their lot. Tiger Elemental Sulfur (90%) is used to lower the pH. Because it dissolves very slowly, it doesn't burn the roots. 250 pounds is used to fertilize the orchard each spring. The local sandy soil contains essentially no nutrition, so they also use 250 pounds of 15-15-15 fertilizer (nitrogen/potassium/phosphorous) in the spring and fall, before a rain if possible.

Blueberries also want lots of water and good drainage. The naturally sandy soil in the area allows too much drainage, so the peat moss and wood chips assist with that.

Don and Roxy dug up all 400 blueberry plants, correctly amended the soil, and replanted them. They took the opportunity to plant them in straight rows. They also put in new emitters.

The irrigation system is... um.... Um, ahhh, well, I missed this part of this talk because just then...

***"Hello, soulmate!!!"***



*Truth to tell, Holly is everyone's soulmate! Dick, Holly and the rest of the attendees enjoy a laugh over one of Roxy's many humorous anecdotes.*

Who could pay attention when this gorgeous creature comes up to you and gives you an enthusiastic "Hello!?" Lord love a duck! I mean, could *you* concentrate with this beautiful face looking at *you*?

Eventually I remembered I was supposed to be taking notes. Thank goodness Don and Roxy provided the "My Blue Heaven Blueberries" handout (see end of article) from which I will shamelessly plagiarize. Back to discussing the irrigation system.

The irrigation system is an elevated double line drip emitter system. Each bush has four 2 GPH pressure compensating emitters. Emitters must be checked and replaced frequently because calcium in the water clogs them.



*Elevated double line drip hoses with red 2 GPH emitters*

The plants are watered often, albeit with short duration. Because blueberries have shallow hair-like roots reminiscent of a Brillo pad, deep watering just wastes water. One hour of watering all the blueberries results in the use of approximately 3,200 gallons of water. Three times a year Roxy says she does more extensive watering in a wider area than that hit by the emitters to encourage outward root growth.

"My Blue Heaven" has two main cultivars. The first is the Sharpblue, which Roxy finds easiest to propagate and the most dependable to grow in their climate. It has light yellow leaves, medium to large size berries, and good flavor. The second is the Misty, which is "harder to get going, but once they do they can kill themselves with vigorous growth." Misty has dark blue leaves, and Roxy detects in the berries a bit of banana flavor.

There are also some Southern High Bush which require less than 200 chill hours and can grow up to seven feet tall if allowed to do so. She's also experimenting with three "Southmoon" plants, a "Sunshine Blue," and a "Pink Lemonade" that is pink and tastes like lemonade.

Since cross-pollination increases the yield, the Misty and Sharpblue are intermixed within each row: one Sharpblue beside a Misty, beside a Sharpblue, etc.

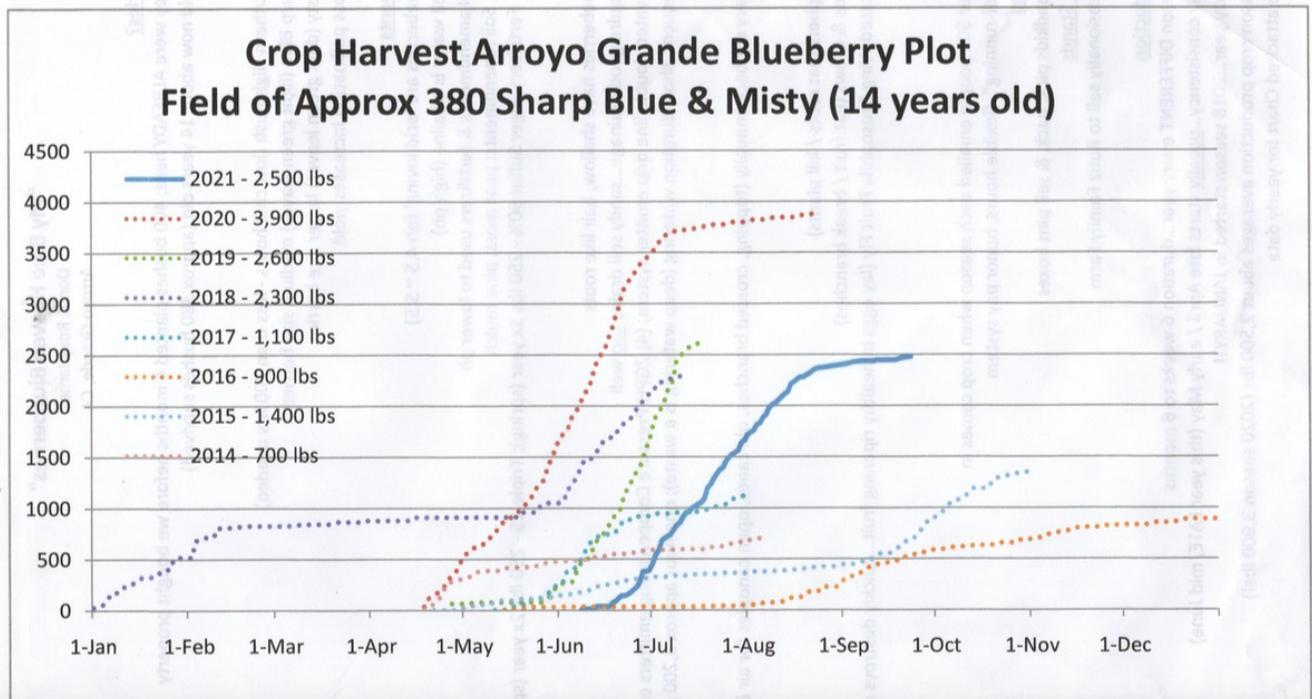


*If you look closely, you may be able to detect the alternate planting of Mistys (dark green) vs. Sharpblues (light green)*

Keep in mind that "dependable" refers specifically to the ecosystem of this blueberry farm. What works for one blueberry farm may not work for another. A variety that does well in the "My Blue Heaven" blueberry farm may not do as well just 12 miles away, much less in Atascadero or Bakersfield.

Blueberries are unpredictable. Roxy says she has done a lot of research, yet the blueberry plants still surprise. One plant can have loads of blueberries, yet one nearby may have very few. Several experts have given her guidance, but the differences between regions may make a big difference what gets implemented.

An example of this unpredictability is evident in the crop harvest time differences from year to year. Typically the crop harvest extends from April through mid-July. However, you can see from the graph Don made how varied the crop season can be.



*Don keeps track of the data from year to year, and helped folks carry out their purchased blueberry plants via tractor.*

One of the biggest challenges is weather. Last year was very cool, and as a result it took a long time for the berries to ripen. This year there was a freak hailstorm in March just as the plants were getting ready to produce. The hail fell for four hours, burning the leaves, which dropped.

Roxy says you can tell from the health of the leaves how good the crop will be. After the hailstorm the plants put all their energy into making new leaves, and the crop was minimal. Mummy berries, which are berries covered with an invisible fungus that causes the berry to look grey and dark and never ripen, needed to be removed so that the nutrients would go to the good berries.



*This year the bushes needed to regrow their leaves after a freak hailstorm in March.*

Your concerns are still not alleviated even if you have a year with fine weather. You still need to contend with gophers (Roxy is an expert gopher catcher and once caught 9 gophers in one day using Macabee gopher traps). And then there are the birds. Some are welcome, like the quail and resident chickens that pick the blueberries off the ground. However the starlings will strip the bushes, and the crows' weight break the branches.

The Spotted Wing Drosophila is yet another menace. These fruit flies look similar to regular fruit flies. You'd need to use a magnifying glass to see the difference. The females insert their ovipositors into the blueberry fruit and deposit eggs. The larvae hatch and begin feeding inside the fruit. The blueberry looks fine at first and you won't know they are there until the blueberry just falls apart. Some of these fruit flies can be caught with vinegar traps. Even with the use of traps, up to 50% of the remaining crop may be infected by the end of the season.

At the end of the season the blueberries get pruned. As you can imagine, pruning 400 blueberry bushes can take a lot of time. This year, because the bushes have started to fruit in the off-season, Roxy and Don have decided not to prune.

Pruning blueberry bushes is similar to pruning a fruit tree, says Roxy. You want to clean up the middle of the plant so that the sun and air can get in. "Lift the skirts" by pruning off all little branches that are less than one foot from the

ground. Pinch off the end of skinny branches to stop growth. You can perform directional pruning to get the plants into the shape you desire.



*A pruned row.*



*An unpruned row.*

Where can you buy blueberry plants? You can buy them from local nurseries and big box stores, but beware. Make sure the varieties being sold will actually grow in your area. Even one well-respected nursery here is selling non-coastal varieties. [Fall Creek Nursery](#) in Oregon specializes in blueberries and is a good place to purchase them. If you're buying on the coast, make sure your variety is coastal, as it must tolerate cool evenings and moisture from fog.

You can plant them in pots. Be sure to plant them with peat moss, and give them lots of water and sun. You can use Azalea food as a fertilizer as blueberries are related to azaleas. You may want to put nets over your precious potted blueberry bushes because once the birds discover them, they'll know exactly where to go when they want more!

Now we humans also know where to return for more.

It wasn't always a self-pick operation. Don and Roxy began selling blueberries via the honor system. They'd load the berries into boxes and put the boxes in their cart at the foot of the driveway.

The system worked fairly well. People were pretty honest, and the farm would only lose about \$5 for every 60 boxes sold. However, picking and filling the boxes was very time consuming.

They tried inviting friends to pick their own instead. This became popular, with friends inviting friends, who would invite other friends. The James' purchased insurance, and now the farm is open to everyone during specific days and hours during the season.

You can pick your own at "My Blue Heaven" when the blueberries are in season. Just get on the James' email list to be notified when the blueberries are ready to be harvested. The current price is \$10/bucket, and each bucket holds about 2.5 pounds.



*The "My Blue Heaven" cart at the foot of the driveway. Adorable, but no longer used. Just come on in and pick your own!*

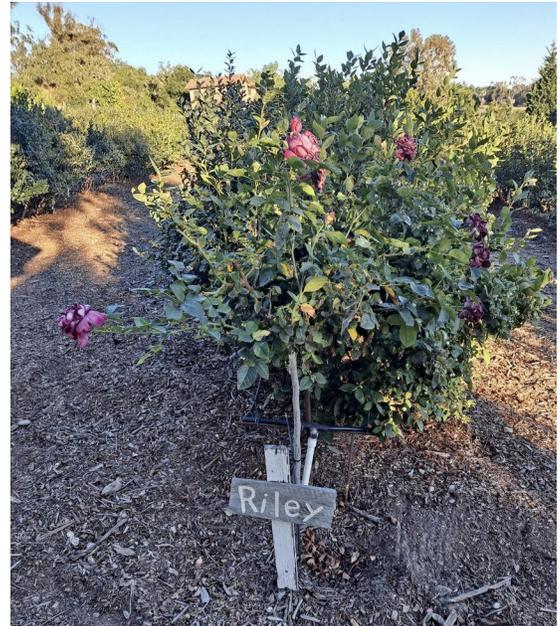
When in season, you may also be able to buy these blueberries from [Rutiz Farms](#).

Roxy offers these suggestions to make the most of your blueberry purchase:

- Try to pick those that are as ripe as possible. Some people pick berries that are pink on top (called "pink shoulders"). These will get more blue in the days after you pick them, but they don't get any riper.
- Don't seal them in bags or containers, or they will get moldy.
- Don't wash them before you freeze them, or in advance of eating them. Blueberries have a natural coating that preserves them. Without the coating they go bad much more quickly. This is why store-bought blueberries can turn to mush in just a few days. If you pick your berries and put them into the refrigerator unwashed, they can last for two to three weeks.



*At "My Blue Heaven," the individual rows are named after the grandchildren.*



In addition to hosting and providing us with an enjoyable day hanging out with each other and learning about blueberries, Roxy and Don contributed to our Chapter in yet another way. They had 4 Sharpblue blueberry bushes available for sale. The demand was so great they ended up selling 10 Sharpblue plants, and are donating all of this money to our Chapter.

Thank you Roxy and Don for a fun and informative meeting!



*Folks gather to check out the Sharpblues for sale, and then we head home.*

## "My Blue Heaven Blueberries"

Don & Roxy James  
Arroyo Grande, CA

### Why Blueberries?

- They were ALREADY here; 400 bushes planted 4 months before we bought property
- Field now about 14 years old (approx 380 bushes survived)

### Cultivars

- Southern High Bush (low chill hours - less than 200 hrs needed)
- Sharp Blue (light green leaves) medium size berries
- Misty (dark green leaves) larger size berries
- Cross pollination increases yield

### Soil Requirements

- Blueberries are 'acid loving' (ph 4.5 ~ 5.5)
- Well water is alkaline (high ph)
- Soil amendments & fertilizers used to lower ph
  - Soil Amendments: peat moss, pine mulch
  - Fertilizers: Tiger Sulfur 90% - 250 lbs 1x year (spring); Triple 15 - 250 lbs 2x year (spring / fall)

### Irrigation

- Blueberries have shallow, hair like roots
- Require good drainage...sandy soil drains too well
- Elevated double line drip emitter system; (4) 2GPH Pressure Compensating emitters ea. bush
- Frequent, short duration watering (deep watering is a waste); one hour approx 3,200 gals

### Pruning

- Heavy cut back annually (topping, crossed branches, old canes, open canopies for air & light)

### Pests

- Gophers (eat roots / kill plants)
- Birds & Crows (eat fruit / break branches)
- Spotted Wing Drosophila Fruit Fly (lay eggs in healthy ripening fruit...quickly destroys crop)

### Marketing

#### U-Pick

- Over 500 people emailed each season when crop comes in
- "Self-running", flexible hours, honor pay system

#### Honor Stand

- Grandkids pick, pack, & sell pint boxes

#### Local Farm Stands

- Occasionally sell to Rutiz Family Farm

### Season & Production

- Season DIFFERENT every year...duration 6 weeks to 6 months
- Only consistency...usually starts late April / early May (this year LATE, mid June)
- Crazy year...2018 season started in JANUARY!!
- Season crop production averages about 2,500 lbs (2020 season 3,900 lbs!)
- See attached Chart for yearly data