



Central Coast Chapter CRFG

November 20th 2023 Newsletter

by Jenny Weaver & Tom Sheldon

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**The December CRFG Meeting is only open to members.
Holiday Potluck, annual elections, plant raffle.**

When: Saturday, December 9, 2023

Members: please check your email for the version of this newsletter that contains directions to the meeting, the time schedule, and details on what to bring.

Announcements of Upcoming Events

From Larry H: Our chapter needs several volunteer positions filled:

The December 9th meeting is just around the corner and with it comes our annual election for chapter officers and committee members. The nominating committee is attempting to find members to fill vacant and soon to be vacant positions. As chair of the Nominating Committee, I feel like the butcher that backed into the sausage grinder and got a little behind in his work! I'm reaching out now to those of you who might be willing to fill some of those positions.

The way our elections work is that the Nominating Committee asks the membership for volunteers to fill the various positions, then at the December meeting we present a slate of candidates to the assembled membership for approval. We would really like to see some of our newer members and members that have not previously participated, to join us. You don't have to be an experienced fruit grower or have specific knowledge or experience to participate, we don't care if you don't know the difference between *Malus* and *Pyrus*, we believe in the Cal Poly credo, Learn by Doing.

Here is a partial list of positions we would like to find volunteers for: Secretary, (an Officer who participates on the Board of Directors). Newsletter Editor, & Newsletter Technical Consultant (these two could be one person!). Program Committee members, Hospitality Committee members, Welcoming & Membership Team, Nominating Committee members. You may be happy to know that you can hold more than one position! Don't wait, contact me at slo4larry@gmail.com to throw your hat in the ring. Additionally, if you currently hold a position that you need to step down from and you have not already notified me, please do that now.

Larry Hollis, Nominating Committee Chair

From Nell, Plant Raffle Chair:

Our December 9th plant raffle has become an annual tradition with our chapter. So, in addition to your potluck dish and a hearty appetite, bring along some cash for raffle tickets and possibly a few plants to donate to the raffle. Look around and see if you have any edible plants to bring and if so, make sure they're healthy and free from insects, snails and weeds. Consider also donating seeds, bulbs, cuttings, etc. All the proceeds from the raffle go right into our scholarship fund, so you're helping future students as well as growing new plants around your house and gardens.

As Joe Sabol would say - don't forget to wear red to the meeting!

Pruning Clinic at CRFG Demonstration Orchard on January 13th, 2024

Can you believe it is almost 2024 and you need to save this date for next year!

Details will be in the next newsletter, but don't forget to save the date.

Meeting Notes and Presentation

Report by Jenny Weaver

Our chapter met at Cal Poly at the fairly new Plant Conservatory, on a sunny Veteran's Day. Manny, our co-chair, started the meeting.



Manny started the meeting

There were a few first-time attendees, one of whom was Wally, former Assistant Dean of Natural Resources at Cal Poly.

Our host was Gage Willey, an Instructional Support Technician. He is from a rice growing family and graduated from the Ornamental Horticulture program in 2019. Gage was hired to organize the plants and their use in classrooms and labs. He explained the goals of the greenhouses. The formal reason is to support Biology and Ecology classes. The informal goal is to get people excited about plants and to get the public in. Hikers in the adjacent Poly Canyon are welcome to stop in.





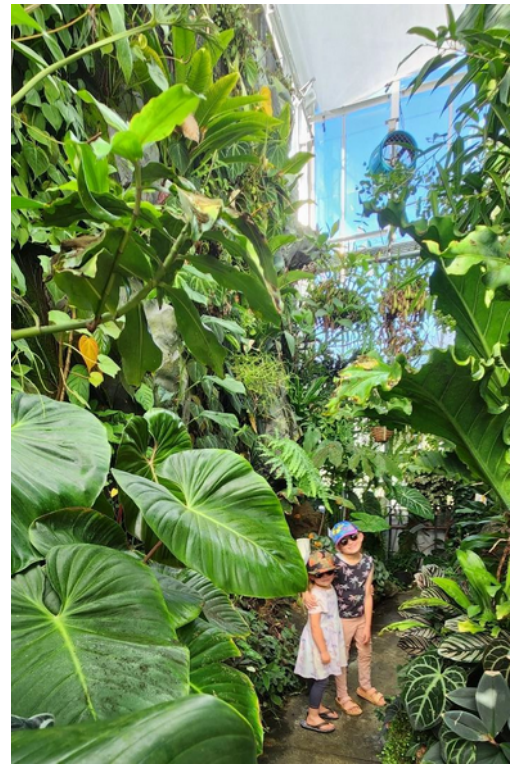
Host Gage Willey talked about the greenhouse construction and contents

There are 5 separate greenhouses, but one is used for storage. The tallest glass house is the hot house, with many tropical edible plants like avocado, vanilla, banana, pineapple and cacao. Cacao is in the Hibiscus family and pollinated by a midge gnat. There is also cinnamon and jack fruit. Gage is looking for nutmeg and clove.



The next house mimics the Cloud Forest which is inundated by high fog like Hawaiian peaks and Costa Rica. There is an occasional mist to keep plants moist. Ferns and air plants grow up the wall on rocks and hang from metal bars.

One special plant in the Cloud Forest has gone extinct in the wilds of Oaxaca, Mexico. It is like a mini trumpet flower. It was from the San Francisco Botanical Garden, found as an unlabeled plant in the back of a greenhouse. Luckily, workers saved it. There was also a plant at the Huntington Gardens in the Los Angeles area but a freeze killed it. Plants like this are hard to collect now due to the Endangered Species Act. The plant was not replanted in it's native Oaxaca area due to development.



Cloud forest hothouse

The third house was for cactus and succulents. It was full of drought tolerant succulents and spiky plants! These plants grow well in our climate.



The last house is dedicated to seedlings including lots of Venus Fly Traps and an enormous Passionfruit vine. It climbed up the front wall and has an enormous football size and shaped fruit. The huge flowers are purple/magenta and scented. The fruit stays yellow/green and is tart.



The Conservatory propagates plants for plant taxonomy and trees for restoration projects. They're growing a lot of Blue Gum Eucalyptus which is a host for the Monarch Butterflies which overwinter on the central coast.

They are also growing street trees that are drought tolerant and hardy natives from Australia and Africa. Cal Poly has contracts with cities. There is a small Eucalyptus species that gets 20' and doesn't shed. Another plant is an Acacia from Chile. Cal Poly sells to nurseries who sell to municipalities.

The facility is surrounded by Cork Oak trees. The trees were planted with root problems (many potbound) so some are stunted and not thriving.

The Conservatory isn't going anywhere soon! It's built on 5 feet of rebar and concrete. The area was once fill dirt so the foundation had to be very stable. Gage wished that soil was available to grow some larger specimens directly in the ground instead of pots or the small raised bed.

The nice, shaded, plant-filled picnic area is open to the public and Gage hopes people who are hiking in Poly Canyon and others will take advantage of the sitting area.

Remember, there are no parking fees on the weekend!



Tom's nephew Chris from Northern Ireland enjoying a Che fruit grown by Gabrielle

Articles and Websites:

Larry Hollis thought this history about the Pismo Oceano Vegetable Exchange POVE would be interesting to read. <http://pove.net/our-history/>

Preserving Persimmons

By Jenny Weaver November 18, 2023

It's Hoshigaki Time!

(Sung to the tune of "It's Howdy Doody time." According to Tom, the words are "It's Howdy Doody time, it's not worth a dime, so turn to channel 9, and watch Frankenstein.")

Hoshigaki is the ancient Japanese art of drying persimmons. Specifically, Hachiya persimmons. As many of you know, these cannot be eaten right off the tree like Fuyu persimmons. They are too hard and very astringent—basically inedible. Normally, you have to wait until they ripen into a soft water balloon where the flesh is almost the consistency of jelly. But with the magical technique called Hoshigaki (peeling and drying Hachiya persimmons in a warm spot or directly in the sun), you can create a sweet exotic treat with a consistency similar to a firm date that last quite a long time. Just in time for Christmas.

The Hoshigaki drying technique was first developed centuries ago in Japan as a means of saving fresh fruit for winter. Hard Hachiya persimmons were peeled and then hung by their stems under the eaves of homes and gently massaged for a few weeks while they dried and softened.



Peeled Hachiya persimmons getting their weekly massage while hanging to dry (Ah, the life!)



Hoshigaki and dehydrated Hachiya slices in a gift box

The tradition was brought to California by Japanese immigrants and became common in the Sierra Foothills and San Joaquin Valley. My former Japanese-American neighbor practiced this technique with the Hachiya persimmons she grew in her yard. This is how I first learned about making Hoshigaki.

If you've ever mistakenly eaten an unripe Hachiya persimmon, you know how horrible they can be. It's the worst mouth experience! Words like, tannin, bitter, sawdust, wool and sand are used to describe the inside of your mouth! So, it's magic that in about five weeks, after gentle weekly massaging, the hard inedible fruit is transformed into a tender, pleasantly chewy, sweet delicacy like a large date.

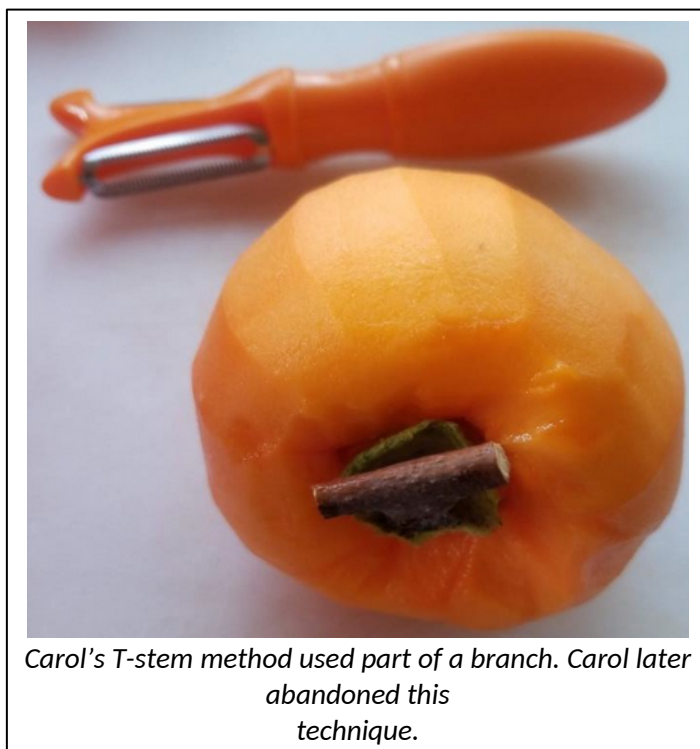
Believe it or not, Hoshigaki can cost anywhere from \$23 to \$70 for a pound, including shipping, so if you don't want to wait 5 weeks for your persimmons to dry, you might be able to find some on-line. However, they are considered a delicacy in Japan and may be hard to find.

In 2018, Carol Scott, Linda Robertson and I gave a presentation about Hoshigaki at the Central Coast Chapter Holiday Potluck & Meeting. A video of this presentation is available on the CRFG Web site at the link below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZV9vPfyONFI>

Each of us had a different technique for hanging and drying Hoshigaki and we talked about the details in the presentation. "Necessity is the Mother of Invention"! Carol's technique was to cut her fruit at the branch to create a "T" on the top of the fruit. She then tied multiple fruits by their T-stem to a long string that hung from a bamboo pole.

Linda's technique was a little different because she purchased persimmons that did not have stems from a local market. She used binder clips which she attached to the calyx, then hung them on a laundry rack and in windows inside her house.



Carol's T-stem method used part of a branch. Carol later abandoned this technique.

My technique involved tying two persimmons together as shown on the right. I tied dental floss around the calyx and then hung the pair over a curtain rod in a south-facing window, sort of like hanging fuzzy dice from a car mirror. This method had some limitations but was good when I had a small crop.



A few years ago, Carol Scott came up with a new technique for hanging her Hachiya persimmons to dry and I have since adopted it. Her new method eliminates the need to cut the branch of the tree in order to make the T-shaped stem. Now she cuts the fruit off the tree at the stem, then attaches a mini shower-curtain clip (available at Amazon) on to the short stem of the fruit as shown to the right. The clip is hung onto plastic straps



Carol's shower-curtain clip method

suspended from bamboo poles, also shown. The straps are sturdy plastic tree ties. Carol puts the poles outside on sunny days and brings them in at night to hang over the fireplace.



Carol's persimmons hanging on tree ties and bamboo

David Gurney is another long time CRFG and Central Coast Chapter member who has been growing Hachiya persimmons and producing Hoshigaki. His technique is to hang them on bamboo poles and put them under his porch eave, the traditional Japanese way and shown below. If it is a cool, dry night, he will leave them out all night. If it is rainy or foggy, he brings them into his house. In 2022, David preserved 1,116 fruits!



David Gurney's persimmons hanging out on his front porch

My previous technique of tying two persimmons with a string and hanging them over a curtain rod had some issues. While it worked well for just a few persimmons, you can imagine that I was limited on how many I could hang from the curtain rod without them touching each other. Getting them on and off the rod was also difficult. So my handy husband Tom built the rack shown in the picture below.



Tom's custom drying rack with Hachiya persimmons in various stages of drying. Can you spot the satellite-shaped Fuyu persimmons?

This rack fits right into the bay window and has tight horizontal chain lengths for hanging persimmons with the shower curtain clips that Carol uses. Now I can hang multiple rows of persimmons in the window. As the persimmons dry and shrink, I can easily rearrange them to make room for more persimmons.

There are a few things you need to know if you want a successful Hoshigaki production.

First, make sure you pick fruit that is totally orange (no green shoulders) but still firm. I made the mistake of using fruit a neighbor picked too soon. It didn't have enough sugar content and the flavor of the dried persimmons was not as good as a properly ripened and picked fruit.

Don't worry if the fruit has dark spots as shown below. This is only skin-deep. The fruit still makes great Hoshigaki!



Dark spots peel right off. The fruit still makes good Hoshigaki.

If there are soft spots, it will be messy to peel and the peeled fruit will not form a dry skin. Below is a picture of fruit that was too soft to hang. Splat! We found this mess after returning from a trip.



Persimmons that are too ripe don't form a skin and drop off. Make sure your persimmons are hard when you peel them.

Tip: Persimmons that are too soft for peeling are ideal for slicing and drying in a dehydrator.

Another thing is to make sure there is good air circulation around the fruit. Fruits should not be touching each other. This can create spots where mold can grow. I keep a ceiling fan running during Hoshigaki season in order to keep air moving. In addition, I have a fruit dehydrator which pushes out a lot of warm air. So I place the dehydrator near the hanging Hoshigaki and run it to dry not only sliced Hachiya persimmons, but other fruit as well. My brother enjoys my homemade fruit cake so I dry all sorts of things in my dehydrator in preparation for the holidays. Hachiya persimmons are one of the best tasting, sweetest fruits, when sliced and dehydrated, especially since this candy-like treat is usually not readily available in stores.

Occasionally, one or more of the hanging fruits may start to get moldy between the wrinkles. This may depend on your environment. Carol recommends fixing this with fresh lemon juice. You basically squeeze some fresh lemon juice into a small bowl, then dip a Q-tip in the juice and wipe it onto the moldy area. Keep an eye on it and repeat if necessary. You can also use vinegar.

Don't get mold (usually black or grey and fuzzy) confused with the white natural sugars that crystalize on the outside of the fruit. This is a natural process of the sugars moving to the outside of the fruit.



The white coating is not mold. Hoshigaki will get a beautiful sugary coating as they dry.

Carol likes to remove the Hoshigaki when the center is still soft, then puts them in the freezer for longer storage. This is a way to enjoy Hoshigaki throughout the year.

If your Hoshigaki becomes too dry and hard, they can be softened before eating. My husband puts them in the microwave for about 5 to 10 seconds and no more. This softens them nicely. I slice the hard ones thinly which makes them easier to eat. As I mentioned, some Hoshigaki may get mold and this might be inside the fruit, so slicing helps you see if the fruit has become moldy inside.

Once your Hoshigaki is dried, you can enjoy them in many ways. Tom and I like to eat them with Ski Cheese (a Norwegian caramelized cheese). They're also good with walnuts or marzipan. Some people recommend enjoying them with Campari. I have also used them in fruitcake as a substitute for dried apricots, but the delicate flavor is lost with all the other flavors.

If you don't have enough time, space or patience to make Hoshigaki, I definitely recommend the dehydration method. You can slice either hard or semi-soft Hachiya persimmons into quarter-inch thick slices and put them in a dehydrator for about 24 hours. The astringency amazingly disappears, and you end up with a sweet and chewy snack in no time. With more drying you'll have a crispy treat.

The only issue with dehydrators is that soft fruit may stick to the drying trays. I have experimented with some techniques I found on the Web:

1. Line the tray with parchment paper
2. Use a mesh screen that is pliable. When the fruit is ready, you can just bend the screen to release the fruit.
3. Use a solid tray like the one used for fruit leathers, then you can use a spatula to scrape off any sticky fruit.
4. Turn the sliced fruit over after an hour. This dries the top a little, so when you turn it over, it doesn't stick as much to the tray.
5. Spray the drying trays with cooking oil. This may impart an oily taste and the fruit will not keep as well because the oil could go rancid.

I tried methods 1-4 and all of them worked well. It's a matter of time or money. Turning the fruit over works pretty well, but it can take some time to do this. The mesh screens or fruit leather trays work pretty well, but they cost a little extra.

Many of you know that Fuyu persimmons (as opposed to Hachiya) can be eaten right off the tree. You can also prepare these for Hoshigaki and even slice them to put in a dryer. However, many people prefer to eat Fuyu persimmons fresh because they do not have the astringent characteristics of the Hachiya and have an appealing crispy texture right off the tree. Hachiya are the traditional fruit used for Hoshigaki and they end up making a sweeter dried fruit.

It's a fun fall project and you should have delicious Hoshigaki treats by Christmas, just in time to give them as gifts if you are willing to share them!

Happy Thanksgiving!

That's all for now folks.