

The Fruit Leaf

September–October 2004



Newsletter

Santa Clara Valley Chapter

California Rare Fruit Growers, Inc.

Notes from the Chair

Corrie Grové

We had a few interesting events since our August meeting. Tom Dean was instrumental in getting 200 cubic yards of mulch, as well as a big front end loader to bring the mulch into the orchard and do some bulk spreading. On Saturday the 14th August, 20 volunteers showed up with rakes, shovels, wheel barrows, kids and a dog. We had the front end loader running and rakes raking, it was a real production and by 2.00 pm the orchard looked a different place. The sun was very hot and we got tired so could not quite finish the job so we still have a few heaps of mulch in the fig area that need spreading, we can do that before our October meeting starting at about 10.00.

Ken Sherfy and Karl Gross tackled the sprinkler system and did a lot of good work there. The watering system was badly damaged but with many repairs, Ken has it basically operating again.

Now that we have the benefit of water running again we also have a lot of weeds needing cutting, It would be wonderful if a few of you could bring a weed whacker with you to the next meeting so we can cut down the weeds before the meeting. If we can start by 10.00 we should help a lot.

Two members opened their gardens for us to visit, read the accompanying article by Sini; unfortunately, I could not attend because I had visitors at home but heard from others that it was very good. We recently also visited Nancy Garrison's garden. These garden visits are wonderful opportunities to learn from for the hosts and the guests, I would like for more members to open their gardens to visitors.

We also had a fig and grape tasting at UC Davis' Wolfskill farm on September 11. Unfortunately the fruit was over its peak, but we still had a very pleasant day and plenty of fruit to taste.

Please bring any plants you do not need to our next meeting, you may sell it for your or "our" gain.

Have a look inside to read about board vacancies, it is important that members participate with new vigor and ideas.

We have a very interesting program by Linda Kincaid for our next meeting which you should not miss, the details are inside.

Please make contributions to this newsletter. You can write about anything happening in your orchard/garden, lessons learned, successes, failures, pests and controls like how to keep the squirrels out of a garden, etc. You can also provide interesting information you read about. E-mail your contributions directly to Bob Allen at boballen@stanfordalumni.org.

Garden Tours with Chapter Members

Sini Falkowski

On a warm Saturday in September several Chapter members visited Kamal Hyder's and Ming-Wei Shen's gardens in Fremont.

The first garden visited was Kamal's. Kamal bought his house in Fremont in late 2001, so it is a relatively young garden. And like Kamal, his garden is neat and well organized. There were several challenges for him before he could start planting a garden. First, his wife wanted a lawn in the front yard, so an agreement was made that he would manage the backyard whilst his wife would have her piece of lawn out in the front. However, I noticed that Kamal has since encroached on Mrs. Hyder's lawn by planting a few fruit trees there. Another big hurdle was that the backyard was entirely covered with 7-inch thick concrete and he had to remove 50 cubic yards of concrete before he could plant anything! The soil was compacted for 15 years so Kamal then tilled the ground and brought in 50 cubic yards of topsoil before he started planting in March and April of 2002.

One of the first dilemmas that Kamal faced is familiar to most of us and that is the lack of space and a small backyard. His solution has been to plant only dwarf and some ultra dwarf fruit trees and even some columnar apples. He did a lot of grafting to have a larger number of varieties on the smallest number of trees. For example, each of his apple and plum trees produces eight varieties of fruit. CRFG and the Scion Exchange

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Santa Clara Valley Chapter of CRFG

October 2 (Saturday) 1 P.M.-4:30 P.M	Prusch Park	Fruits and Wildlife of Borneo by Linda Kincaid. Linda writes the Organic Gardening column for the <i>Fruit Gardener</i> . Feature length articles on her adventures can be found in the January and March issues. She also recently wrote an article on proboscis monkeys for the National Wildlife Federation.
December 4 (Saturday) 1 P.M.-4:30 P.M	Prusch Park	Speaker and topic still to be confirmed.

were Kamal's sources of scion material, inspiration and education. He also grew grapevines espaliered along the walls. Since he has run out of room in the backyard, he also grows plants in wine barrels in the front yard. All told, he has over 105 different varieties of fruits.

Another challenge for him was lack of time due to long work hours and work travel. Kamal did his best to make the garden as low-maintenance as possible. He planted spreading plants like mint and raspberry only in containers. He also developed an automated networked watering system that he can control watering and monitor the conditions via the Internet from anywhere in the world. The system has local intelligence so that it provides extra watering on very hot days and cuts back on watering on cooler days. The next version of this device will also keep track of soil moisture. Kamal has written a 600-page book, to be published in November 2004, which describes this system in detail.

Another challenge was to suppress weeds without spending too much time or using chemicals. His solution is to drip irrigate to allow water to go only where needed. He also poured 400 lbs. of concrete between his yard and his neighbor's yard to keep the grass from crawling into his.

The fourth challenge were the birds eating his fruit (as

of now squirrels have not been a problem). Kamal keeps birdfeeders full of seeds in his front and back yards and he will try netting his fruit next year. For example, the Italian 395 fig ripens quickly and the birds often get to them before Kamal does. He also uses Tanglefoot to deter ants from attacking his fig tree and nurturing colonies of aphids on the other trees.

Kamal grows a dozen varieties of Citrus. In the beginning, most of these did not set fruit and the leaves

Board Members Election

At our next meeting we have to elect new board members to replace retiring members Sini Falkowski and Katie Wong. Nancy Garrison may be re-elected as Vice Chair. Cathy Berwaldt may be re-elected as Secretary. Other candidates please apply.

Please consider serving on the board or nominate some one who would be willing to serve. Board meetings take place only every two months immediately after our regular meetings and last no more than 1 1/2 hours. Interested persons may phone me at home to discuss any position they may be interested in: 650 372 0516.

A very big thank you to all the retiring board members!

Corrie Grové

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would fall off. The problems were caused by poor drainage and poor watering. His remedy was to mix lot of "Profile" soil additive to the soil around each plant and to keep the soil around the plants moist – this seems to keep the citrus problems under control.

Kamal wanted to attract more beneficial insects and so he planted a number of flowers to do this. He wanted to hide his neighbor's ugly chain link fence and the solution was to plant grapevines along it. Next year, he expects the leaves to hide the fence completely and the fence would serve as trellising for the grapevines. Kamal believes in organic gardening and uses a "ComposT-Twin" for composting. Now that he has obtained good results with grafting, he plans to graft and donate several fruit trees to the Quarry Lakes Regional Park in Fremont. Pictures of Kamal's garden can be viewed at:

<http://groups.msn.com/KamalsGarden>

I next went to Ming-Wei's garden a few miles away in Fremont, CA. Again Ming-Wei has an average size lot in suburbia. Ming-Wei has combined landscaping plants with fruiting ones and he has planted citrus which he has grafted with a multitude of varieties. On one lemon tree I counted well over a dozen citrus grafts. He has had much success with regular scion grafting and uses this method instead of bud grafting.

As we entered his back gate all so several tropical guavas and strawberry guava, too. When the Shen's purchased there home there was a swimming pool that utilized most of the back yard. Ming-Wei has innovatively covered the pool, as he and his wife are not avid swimmers and preferred a garden instead. The pool was drained and there is access to the bottom that provides gardening storage. Along the parameters of the old pool are fruiting plants in the ground but the garden is a study in container planting. Ming has a great number of pitahaya growing in containers and some very innovatively. I noticed apple, plum, cherry and other fruiting trees in the ground. If people would like to view some of the plants in Ming-Wei's garden, they are welcome to visit his online album at <http://photo.epson.com/> and then enter the email mwshen1951@yahoo.com to visit it.

Each garden has its own set of problems and it is interesting to see how individuals solve them. If you would like our chapter to have more gardening tours, please contact our program chair, Sarah Sherfy and submit your garden for touring. Her email is: sherfy@us.ibm.com or phone: (408) 846-5373.

Zaiger Genetics Tour

Gail Morrison & Jack Tucker

Zaiger Genetics was prepared when a lively swarm of CRFGers descended on the world-renowned family enterprise in Modesto for a tour on July 17. Helpers outside the entrance guided cars to parking along the highway. Inside the property, the irrepressible Ed Laivo of Dave Wilson Nursery distributed name tags and divided the crowd into two smaller groups—one going by bus to the fields while the other toured the lab and greenhouse. The two groups reversed when each phase was completed.

Floyd Zaiger was an "understudy" of Dr. Fred Anderson, who was an understudy of Luther Burbank. Zaiger started out intending to develop rootstock. He got some material from Dave Wilson, and eventually asked, "Aren't you going to send us a bill?" Wilson said, "If you get anything good, let us sell it for you." And so began a long, harmonious working relationship. After their work was done for the year, the two would go hunting and fishing together. Today, Dave Wilson Nursery is the primary US propagator and licensor of varieties developed by Zaiger's Inc. Genetics.

Zaiger Genetics doesn't actually grow anything. "We sell an idea." They use their 200 acres to develop promising new fruit trees (primarily stone fruit). They are constantly evaluating for desirable traits, and eliminate the vast majority of plants, keeping only those that show the potential to be outstanding. Once a variety is chosen as a likely candidate for development, budwood is sent to

growers. If the growers determine that it is something they can grow and sell, then trees will be propagated and sold. Zaiger makes its money from royalties on those trees.

Up to 60 percent of the plum production in California is now Zaiger pluots. The company's market is worldwide. Nine out of ten stone fruit trees planted now in Europe are from Zaiger. They are also big in Australia and New Zealand. In some areas of the world, they have trouble with unauthorized propagation, similar in nature to piracy of music and film.

Our group began in the lab with son Grant Zaiger and daughter Leith. In the lab, embryos of early-ripening fruit are grown in test tubes. Holding an ordinary test tube with a small tree in it was fascinating. Even though they grow 80,000 seedlings a year, the Zaigers take great care to point out that they use classical breeding techniques, relying on "controlled luck" and accelerated growing techniques. And many years of expertise, I might add. No "Frankenfruit" here!

Record-keeping for all those crosses and seedlings is a huge task. Once, a record book was accidentally left in the field and run over by a tractor. Ever since, they keep many backups.

Our next stop was the greenhouse, where the young plants are grown out and many more started from seed.

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We then went out to see the "parents," the trees used to make crosses. They are grown in large containers painted with arcane codes to indicate which ones they are. Since they are in containers, they can be more easily manipulated. For example, they may be moved into cold storage to provide chill hours or delay flowering. Many different trees are grown in close quarters, and all receive the same basic cultural care. This is one of the ways they can eliminate those especially prone to diseases or other troubles.

A lively debate broke out, there among the trees, on the merits of hard, or "commercial ripe" fruit vs. soft, or "tree-ripened" fruit. Daughter Leith said, "Our varieties will soften up," but many in the tree-ripe camp remained unconvinced. There was some comment that more and more people have grown up with "crisp" grocery-store fruit, and that is becoming what they expect and prefer.

Next, we boarded the bus that had just brought the first group back, and went out to the fields where they grow out the plants. This part of the tour was hosted by son Gary Zaiger. His job is to walk up and down the rows of young trees, 8 or 9 hours a day, 5 days a week, and evaluate them for taste as well as appearance, consistency of fruit size, ripening, and disease resistance. That is a lot of fruit tasting! The space between the rows of trees was littered with dried fruit debris. Bud wood is taken from the three year-old trees that are likely

candidates for new introductions, and then all the trees are taken out and burned. The bud wood is sent to the growers who propagate and grow the trees.

It was a hot sunny day, although mild by Modesto standards, and after an hour or so out in the field people began drifting back to the bus. We returned for a fruit tasting of pluots and peaches, put on by the Dave Wilson Nursery.

A special treat was a brief talk by Floyd Zaiger himself, and Robert Woolley, president of Dave Wilson (the son-in-law of the son-in-law of Dave Wilson). Floyd Zaiger said, "It took a long time to work up the bridges" between species that need to be used for interspecific crosses. These "bridges" can be used in developing future varieties.

He said that the genes for various desirable characteristics are already there; it's just that no one has yet grown out enough trees for them all to express themselves. He likened their work to playing solitaire. You have all the spots there on the cards (analogous to the genes), and there are so many possible combinations that you know you're almost certainly going to lose. But you keep playing because you know that sooner or later you'll get a winning combination.

For more info about Zaiger Genetics, see http://davewilson.com/z_file/TOC_zaiiger.html

Are you a CRFG, Inc., Member?

Sini Falkowski

In our local Santa Clara Valley Chapter of CRFG, Inc., we have a large, healthy membership. Alas, not all our chapter members belong to CRFG, Inc., the mother organization. According to organization bylaws, chapter members should also belong to CRFG, Inc. We have never demanded that our local members join the parent organization, but we do fully encourage each chapter member to do so.

Now CRFG, Inc. is in financial trouble and the membership has dropped from over 4,000 members down to 2,000 plus. Some of it has to do with an aging membership. CRFG, Inc. needs to grow the membership quickly in order to survive. If local chapter members do not sustain the parent organization, it will go defunct which means local chapters will cease to exist also. Some say, oh, we don't need CRFG, Inc. and be a group within ourselves here in Santa Clara Valley. That is not entirely true as part of your membership fees to CRFG, Inc. take care of insurance which umbrellas all the chapters. Buying insurance on our own would be prohibitive. All venues including Prusch Park require organizations to carry their own insurance.

Membership to CRFG, Inc. includes a beautiful full-color magazine, the *Fruit Gardener*, delivered to your door six times a year. All the articles are interesting to read which I do from cover to cover each issue, and there are columns dealing with organic, container gardening, and a seed bank.



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