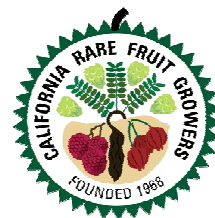


# LOS ANGELES CHAPTER

July 2007 Volume X Issue 4



<http://www.crfg-la.org>

2007 Chapter Officers  
& Committees

Chairman:  
Bob Goldsmith  
818 889-6875 [chairman@CRFG-la.org](mailto:chairman@CRFG-la.org)

Co-Chairman:  
Jorge Pelaez  
323 737-8188 [co-chair@CRFG-la.org](mailto:co-chair@CRFG-la.org)

Treasurer:  
K. Payton  
818 222-7556 [treasurer@CRFG-la.org](mailto:treasurer@CRFG-la.org)

Newsletter Editor:  
Pat Valdivia  
805-5846244 [editor@CRFG-la.org](mailto:editor@CRFG-la.org)

Program Chairman:  
Lynn Maxson  
805 527-3912 [program@CRFG-la.org](mailto:program@CRFG-la.org)

Historian:  
Emory Walton  
805 497-8835 [historian@CRFG-la.org](mailto:historian@CRFG-la.org)

Ways & Means:  
Edgar Valdivia  
805 584-6244 [ways@CRFG-la.org](mailto:ways@CRFG-la.org)

Special Events:  
Richard Watts  
805 484-3584 [events@CRFG-la.org](mailto:events@CRFG-la.org)

Membership:  
Anita Drapkin  
818 888-8630  
[membership@CRFG-la.org](mailto:membership@CRFG-la.org)

Food Coordinator:  
Chris Warren  
818 362-8537 [food@CRFG-la.org](mailto:food@CRFG-la.org)

Plant Sales:  
David Payton  
818 222-7556 [plants@CRFG-la.org](mailto:plants@CRFG-la.org)

Secretary/Hospitality:  
Edith Watts  
805 484-3584 [hospitality@CRFG-la.org](mailto:hospitality@CRFG-la.org)

Development Fund:  
Bob Vieth  
805 495-9789

## July Meeting

**Date:** Saturday, July 28, 2007

**Time:** 10:00 A.M.

**Place:** Sepulveda Garden Center  
16633 Magnolia Blvd., Encino, CA 91316

**Program:** Gisele Schoniger, the category manager and organic gardening educator at Kellogg Garden Products, will be our speaker. In her 27 years in the Garden Industry, Schoniger has accumulated a wide range of experience and knowledge. She earned her degree in ornamental horticulture from California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo.

Gisele joined the "Kellogg Family" over six years ago where she oversees the "Natural/Organic" products category with products such as Gardner & Bloome Natural & Organic Soils, Dr. Earth Fertilizers and Soils as well as a whole array of other natural products. She shares her wealth of gardening wisdom as an educator to the industry and consumers all across the West..

**\*\*\*There will be a short meeting of our Chapter Officers after the meeting\*\*\***

## August Meeting

**Date:** Saturday, August 25, 2007

**Time:** 10:00 A.M.

**Place:** Tor McInnis' home  
17508 Sunburst, Northridge 91325

**Program:** We are in for a real treat as **Tor McInnis**, a landscaping expert, leads us on a tour of his truly spectacular garden. So what's to see during the heat of August? Still a lovely landscape with structure that's got plenty of space in the process of being reclaimed. The many citrus trees, which have been placed not as an orchard, but as a part of the working landscape, are maturing. Some of the tropicals have survived the winter's cold snap, but many of the grafted stone fruits have been lost to a mutating disease.

All should come away with learning something about landscaping or gardening in general. **TOR** hopes that his being able to share some of the losses along with the wins in less than prime condition might better alleviate some of the fears that other members may have in hosting a chapter home tour. He is opening his yard in the hope that it encourages those who have never felt their yard was 'up' for a chapter tour will reconsider and allow our members to learn from and experience rare fruit growing at all stages and levels.

**Directions:** Take the 101 freeway and exit at Lindley Ave. Go north to Nordoff and make a right turn; on Encino, make a right turn and at Sunburst a right turn. Arrive at **17508 Sunburst.**

## BLACK SAPOTE

by ALFREDO CHIRI



Donated by: **CRFG/** Stillman Planted in 1991 (r.f.-020)  
Common names: Chocolate Fruit, Black Persimmon, Sapote Negro, Zapote Prieto, Zapota do Mico, Matasano do Mico and Ebano.

This tree is not really a sapote; it is closely related to the persimmon family rather than allied to the sapote (*Pouteria sapote*) or to the white sapote (*Casimiora edulis*). For many years it was misidentified as *Diospyrous ebenaseter*, a name applied to a wild species of the West Indies. The presently accepted binomial for the black sapote is *D. digma*.

The black sapote is native to Mexico and Central America. Apparently in 1692 the Spaniards spread the plants through the Philippines and some of the Asian countries.

The tree is handsome, broad-topped, slow growing to eighty feet in height, has a furrowed trunk to thirty inches in diameter and black bark.

The leaves are elliptic-oblong, tapered at both ends, glossy, and four to twelve inches long.

The flowers, borne singly or in groups in the leaf axils, are tubular, lobed and white. Some have both male and female organs with a faint fragrance; others are solely male and have a pronounced gardenia-like scent.

The fruit is bright green and shiny at first. On ripening, the smooth skin becomes an olive green and then a rather muddy green. Within is a mass of glossy, brown to very dark brown, almost black, somewhat jelly-like pulp, soft, sweet and mild in flavor. In the center are one to twenty flat, smooth brown seeds three quarters to one inch long. The fruits are often seedless.

Certain trees tend to bear a very large, seedless or nearly seedless fruits during the summer months instead of the winter months as most trees do. No variety names have been given to these cultivars.

The black sapote is not a strictly tropical tree, it is more of a hardy tree when the tree has become well established. Young trees need to be protected the first few years. Older trees have withstood brief temperatures of 28 degrees to 30 degrees F. In Mexico the tree is cultivated up to elevations of 5,000 feet.

The black sapote has a broad adaptability as to terrain. The tree thrives on moist sandy loam, on well-drained soil. The tree will also adapt to dry areas and clay that is in constant exposure to water.

The black sapote is usually grown from seeds. Seeds remain viable for several months in dry storage and germinate in about thirty days after planting in flats. Seedlings are best transplanted to pots when they are about three inches high, and they are set in the fields when one to two years old. At that time they are one to two feet tall. They should be spaced at least twenty-four feet apart.

Fruits picked when bright green (full-grown) ripen in ten days at room temperature. Firm olive green fruits ripen in two to six days. Black sapotes are very soft when fully ripe.

## Attention All of You Fruit Enthusiasts

Join experts as they share their agricultural practices, recent developments, and technological advances in growing rare and unusual fruits at this year's **Festival of Fruit**. This year's conference is being produced by a three way partnership between both **CRFG San Diego Chapters and the Southwestern College "Landscape & Technology"** program.

### August 10-11, 2007 - Southwestern College - San Diego, California

When you attend the **2007 Festival of Fruit** you will be able to select from over 20 different presentations related to propagation, growing, maintaining and enjoying the most delicious and unusual fruits that can be grown in California. You will hear special guests discuss their experience in growing temperate, subtropical, and tropical fruits. You will also have the rare opportunity to taste fruit grown in California, as well as take advantage of the offerings from fruit tree nurseries and other vendors.

You will have the chance to meet and exchange information with experts within this exclusive group of people.

. Enjoy the exciting guided and self-guided tours through some of the fabulous gardens of our members, groves, and the fruit garden at **Quail Botanical Garden**. There will also be an exclusive full day trip to the markets of Tijuana to enjoy the herbs, spices and fruits of Mexico. Please visit: <http://www.festivaloffruit.org> for more information and registration form.



Alex Silber showing his very rare canistel tree

About 40 enthusiastic CRFG members met at Papaya Tree Nursery last month for a wonderful tour. **Alex Silber**, very articulately and proudly showed off the wonderful plants growing at this Granada Hills location. Starting at the front yard, we saw caper bushes in full bloom, guavas, jujubes, carob, pomegranates, Persian mulberry, kei apple to name a few. As the morning progressed we continued to be impressed with the abundance of wonderful fruit trees: Surinam cherry, black sapote, cherimoyas, figs, sapodilla, longan, canistel, starfruit, papayas. Many of our members were seen happily carrying off their newly purchased plants. Thanks so much **Alex**. We learned a lot.

## PICNIC PLUM COOKIES

### Ingredients:

3 fresh plums  
 2 1/4 c. sifted flour  
 1 tsp. baking soda  
 1/2 tsp. salt  
 1/2 tsp. cinnamon  
 1/2 c. butter or oleo, softened  
 3/4 c. brown sugar, packed  
 1 large egg  
 1/2 c. sour cream  
 1/4 c. flaked coconut

### Method:

Pit and finely chop plums to measure 1 cup. Re sift flour with soda, salt and cinnamon. Cream butter with sugar until fluffy. Beat in egg and sour cream. Stir in flour mixture and coconut. Fold in chopped plums. Drop by rounded tablespoon onto greased baking sheet. Bake at 375 degrees for 12 minutes.

Yield: 2 dozen.

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## WHO'S WHO?

### DICK & EDITH WATTS

#### Richard "Dick"

**Watts** has gardened wherever he's had soil to work with. A native Californian, **Dick** has a BS degree in subtropical Horticulture from UCLA. He worked with Armstrong Nurseries and later became an Agricultural Inspector in Ventura County. He retired from this position in 1983 and has been able to spend much more time in his Camarillo home working with rare fruits and plant culture. It was at this time that he joined CRFG and became a very active member of our organization. **Dick** has been in charge of 'Special Events' and promoted our organization at Home Shows, County Fairs and the annual Sepulveda Fair.



By the time **Edith** met **Dick**, she already had developed a love of growing things. Growing up in a small farming community in Lansing, Michigan, **Edith** was quickly exposed to farming. Plowing, disking, growing wheat, oats and vegetables was a part of her teenage years. When Edith moved to California she continued her nursing studies and graduated from the University of Phoenix. Not only has **Edith** been a nurse, she has also authored and published two text books. One is still in print. **Edith**, too has dedicated much of her time to CRFG. Joining CRFG at the same time as **Dick**, **Edith** has been very active; she was the previous editor of this newsletter. She is now a member of the Development Fund, Hospitality Chairman and Secretary of our LA Chapter.

There is no doubt that both **Edith** and **Dick Watts** are wonderful assets to our organization.



## OPPOSSUMS: YOUR GAREN'S EVENING CLEAN-UP CREW

(article written by **Lili Singer** for LA Times, June 28,2007)

**LAURA SIMON**, field director for the Humane Society's Urban

Wildlife Program, does not mince words: "People are repulsed by their appearance."

Can you blame them? Opossums, after all, do look like bloated rats — the scruffy fur, the flinty eyes, the bizarre little feet and long, scaly tail. And that's their good side. Threaten one of them, and it will bare its teeth, hiss and drool.

But as disgusting as the animals may appear, they actually do quite lovely work in the garden. Opossums are nature's clean-up crew, working the graveyard shift. Like little dust busters, they cruise the landscape, round ears tilted like satellite dishes, fleshy pink snoots to the ground. They feast on snails and slugs, perhaps even a cockroach or two.

Gardeners may blame opossums for the messes and mischief made by rambunctious raccoons, skunks and squirrels rooting out insect grubs, but the reality is that opossums don't dig. They can't. The soft pink skin on their paws is too delicate for such manual labor; their weak nails are built for tree-climbing.

Though opossums are excellent at scaling trunks, they rarely sample the fruit above. Instead, they might salvage a fallen peach or munch avocados knocked down by squirrels. Opossums prefer their produce at ground level and well rotted — all the easier to sniff out as they forage the night garden.

The animals are effective scavengers, says **Jim Dines**, collections manager of mammalogy at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. It may not help their image problem, but opossums do eat the really gross stuff too: stinky carrion that other wildlife simply won't consider. Lest you get too disgusted, just remember that this is the detritus that no gardener wants to handle, even with gloved hands.

IF opossums are so docile, harmless and downright helpful, then why are so many people — even sensitive gardeners who have designed their landscapes to attract wildlife — so intensely repulsed by this animal?

The average person thinks they're so ugly, they're scary, says **Simon** of the Urban Wildlife Program. Most calls coming into the hotline that she runs are fear-based.

"People think the animals must be rabid," she says.

In truth, **Simon** and other experts say, the opossum is one of the gentlest animals out there. When it senses danger, it usually just freezes, motionless, and waits for the hazard to pass.

When threatened, the animal can look awfully mean, but it's

all a big show. Opossums don't run or bite well. They're not very coordinated and, in **Simon's** words, they're not the most intellectual of creatures.

If the baring-teeth-and-hissing drama doesn't work, they feign death by entering a temporary coma. This strategy doesn't fool dogs and other large predators, according to **Mary Cummins**, a Los Angeles-based licensed wildlife rehabilitator and educator. She takes in 600 injured or orphaned opossums each year.

The rabies fear is unfounded because the disease is rarely found in opossums, says **Catherine Conlon**, a veterinarian and rabies specialist formerly with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and recently named director of the rabies lab at Kansas State University.

This apparent resistance to rabies may be attributed to the opossum's low body temperature, which prevents buildup of the rabies virus. That same low body temperature may allow opossums to eat horribly decayed food without getting sick.

Rabies may not be an issue, but opossums do harbor parasites, including fleas, and they can host a bacterial disease called leptospirosis that can be transmitted to humans. That's why it's not smart to touch a wild opossum or keep one as a pet. Says **Dines**, "It's not an animal you'd want to play with."

THE species that calls Southern California home is actually the Virginia opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*), the only marsupial living in the wilds of North America. As with the kangaroo, koala and other marsupials, the female opossum nurtures her undeveloped pups in a pouch. ("Possums," for the record, are distant relatives found only in Australia.)

The Virginia opossum is native to the Southeast, where it is still common. It emigrated west, **Dines** says, most likely with the help of humans, who carried the animals as curiosities or pets. The first opossum was trapped and recorded in Los Angeles County in 1906. Today, they populate wide-ranging habitats from Baja California to British Columbia.

Life in the city is grueling for the opossum. Mortality is high, and few live to their first birthday. Dogs and cars are the biggest threats. Garden pesticides, especially snail baits, also put the opossum at risk.

What to do if you see one in your yard? The opossum's defenders will suggest that you enjoy it — perhaps smile at its prehensile tail, or note how the rear feet have evolved with nifty opposable thumbs. Admire its adaptability, then let it proceed with the good work it came to do.

**If your last name begins with A-M, please bring something for our Tasting Table for the July Meeting**