



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

LOS ANGELES CHAPTER

2021 Volume XXVI Issue 6

CRFG-LA meetings at Sepulveda Garden Center are currently suspended. We hope everyone is staying safe and healthy.

ZOOM MEETING:

Saturday, November 20, 10:00 am

Speaker: Dr. Shengrui Yao

Topic: Jujubes

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Jujubes, also called “Chinese Dates” because of their size and appearance when dried, have been cultivated in China for more than 4,000 years. The California Rare Fruit Growers is excited to welcome Dr. Shengrui Yao, considered by many to be the foremost jujube expert in the United States, as she shares her insights about this rare fruit.

Dr. Shengrui Yao’s background includes a Ph.D. in Horticulture/Pomology, and minors in Plant Pathology and Soil Microbiology from Cornell University. Dr. Yao is the perfect person to teach us about this rare and unusual fruit from China. She has the unique perspective of having been raised with a fruit that many in the western world have never even heard of, much less tasted. She currently works at the Department of Plant and Environment Science, Sustainable Agriculture Science Center at Alcalde, New Mexico State University.

CRFG-ONLY HOLIDAY PARTY

Saturday, December 11, 10:00 am

Location: TBA

Save the date!

CALENDAR FOR LA CHAPTER 2022

January 22	Grafting demo/scion exchange/plant sale (silent auction) – bring donations!
February 26	Dr Jonathan Crane - Lychees
March 25	To be announced
April 23	To be announced
May 28	To be announced
June 25	To be announced
July 23	To be announced
August	No Meeting - Fruit Festival
September 24	To be announced
October 22	To be announced
November 19	To be announced
December 10	Holiday Party

Words From Our Chairman

By Jerry Schwartz

Jerry is busy getting ready for the holidays, but will be back next year!

LOOKING BACK

By Deborah Oisboid, Editor

September 25 - Squirrels in the garden

Our September speaker had us all at the edges of our seats. With about 35 chapter members attending, we listened in fascination as Dr. Niamh Quinn, a Human-Wildlife Interactions Advisor of the University of California's Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources spoke to us about ground and tree squirrels, their characteristics and habits, and the methods typically used to control them.

How do you know that your crops are being savaged by squirrels and not by rats? The tooth pattern is a good indicator. Squirrel incisors (front) are larger and further apart than rats' teeth.



In California we have both tree squirrels and ground squirrels. They look similar but have different homes and lifestyles. Both types build cavity nests: grasses and twigs, all rolled up in a ball. Ground squirrels burrow into the ground, while tree squirrels live in tree hollows.

Ground squirrels can climb, but tree squirrels never retreat into the ground. If you chase a squirrel, it will run in the direction it lives: up or down.

Two ground squirrel species in California cause the most damage: the California ground squirrel and Belding's ground squirrel. Not only do they eat crops, girdle trees, and mangle irrigation lines, but their burrows can cause soil erosion, water issues, and can be a major tripping hazard.



California ground squirrel (Photo: Monica Dimson/UCCE)



Belding's ground squirrel (Photo: Jack Kelly Clark/UC IPM)

They are also disease vectors, which is not as big an issue in urban areas, but becomes a major problem near forests and wild areas where they can spread plague and other diseases. Fortunately, there is no rabies in California squirrels. (Some bats do carry rabies, but squirrels, skunks, and raccoons do not - the bigger concern is distemper.)

You won't find ground squirrel burrows in the middle of your garden. Ground squirrels live on the "edge" of things, where they can look out for predators. These areas are generally bare, which allows them to identify enemies in the air and on the ground. However, our expert recommends **AGAINST** growing tall vegetation as a preventive measure, since it could attract other pests. ("Better the enemy you know, than the one you don't know.")

If you are near a flood control channel and have a ground squirrel issue, Dr. Quinn urges you to communicate with your County Agriculture Department and Flood Control divisions, as anything you do could affect water control.

As for tree squirrels, California has plenty of species, some of which we don't want to kill. The adorable Douglas squirrel



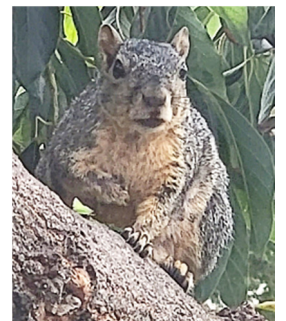
is one of them. Red-furred, small and vocal, with tufts on their ears, they are sometimes called "Chickarees." We are unlikely to see them in an urban setting. The more problematic squirrels are:

Eastern gray squirrel - non native, reddish gray-brown upper, grey belly, mid-size, relatively narrow tails, short ears compared to Western gray squirrels.



Western gray squirrel - gray color, frosted tips, prominent ears, white underbelly.

Eastern fox squirrel (also known as "Fox" or "Bryant's" squirrel) - non native, reddish brown fur. It is the most common as well as the most destructive of our squirrels.



Of all the tree squirrels, only Eastern Fox squirrels can be killed without a hunting license or permit. (You cannot kill a gray squirrel without a hunting license.)

But they're so CUTE! Why do they need to be controlled? For many reasons. Health and safety, crop theft and garden destruction, and competition with native wildlife.

You should not rely on any one method for control. Instead, use an integrated management program. Control methods include using a repellent, baiting, trapping, habitat modification, burrow fumigation, and biological control. Some methods are more effective than others. And some cannot legally be used in a home orchard.

The simplest method is repulsion. The problem with dummy raptors or "effigies" is that rodents are quite intelligent and adaptable. Fake owls or electrosonic (sound) emitters may be effective at first, but squirrels can get used to them, and will ignore them after a while. You need to keep moving the repellent to new locations.

Since squirrels respond to "perceived threats," a fluctuating, wriggling effigy is more effective than a static one. Sprinklers can sometimes work. Someone asked about using coyote urine crystals. Dr. Quinn doesn't recommend those because you may encourage local coyotes to come into the yard. Lion urine? She knows of no evidence that it works.

Biological control such as sterilization is not very effective. It would take tremendous effort to catch and sterilize a significant portion of a local squirrel population.

In the city, there are no natural predators capable of controlling squirrel populations - they didn't start as urban animals. And tree squirrels are really good at avoiding predators: it's difficult to attack one in a tree.

Squirrels are considered an "r-selected" species. These are animals which are good colonizers and rapid reproducers. While predators, such as hawks, may catch some rodents, they are not generally known to control the population. Owls aren't good squirrel hunters, since they hunt at night and squirrels are daytime animals.

That leaves traps and poisons. The biggest problem with these methods is that we have local endangered animals as well as pets, and even humans which can be affected. Poison control needs to be appropriate to the rodent lifecycle, as squirrels' diet switches between fresh greens in spring to seeds in fall. Some chemicals are not

available to homeowners, or can only be used by licensed professionals.

Traps and bait stations are effective but can be dangerous. Some have tubes which a toddler (or even an adult) can stick their hand inside of. Appropriate safety precautions need to be taken when using these.

Our speaker mentioned pre-baiting - put food out everywhere, and slowly remove everything until only the bait within the trap remains. This gets the squirrels used to the bait, even seeking it out. The younger animals are less cautious and will show up first. It is better to wait for the older rodents to become used to the traps, THEN set them. The older, dominant animals reproduce. Those are the pests you most want to stop.

California has significant legal requirements for the trapping and killing of any animal. It is illegal to feed any wildlife. It is illegal to transport any trapped wild animal, from skunks to rats to squirrels. Most of the methods for killing a trapped animal are also illegal. It may become necessary to hire a licensed professional.

Although Dr. Quinn went into much more detail into the lethal methods of squirrel control, I will not be including them in this article. Without providing the background or helpful illustrations, the information could be misinterpreted or used incorrectly.

Dr. Quinn recommends the following website for helpful ground squirrel information, including baits and traps: www.groundsquirrelBMP.com.

Although written a few years ago, the UCANR Green Bulletin has excellent information on tree squirrel controls. See the first article in this issue:

<http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PDF/PUBS/greenbulletin.2015.may.pdf>

If you plan to trap and/or kill squirrels, she recommends researching the California Fish and Game Code.

<https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=178840&inline> (See Chapter 6, pg 257, and Part 3, pg 351.)

She admits it's very data-intensive and may be difficult to read.

In conclusion, our expert admitted the only way to 100% prevent squirrels from eating the fruit in your yard is to not grow fruit at all. They can't eat what they can't pick. She compared squirrel control to mowing grass. Just because it looks good the first time you mow does not mean you can stop. As long as you have a lawn you will need to mow it.

Dr. Quinn's expertise with ground and tree squirrels was amazingly comprehensive. Her online presence includes: Twitter: @SCUWMCouncil Instagram: @cosmopolitancoyotes www.ucSCURRI.com

We thank Dr. Quinn very much for sharing her time and knowledge with us, and hope to invite her back again in the future!

October 23 - Tour of Bill Brandt's Garden

Bill Brandt is a former CRFG-LA chairman, a teacher, a grafting expert, and an amazing gardener. He started with a few stone fruit trees and a vegetable garden, and then, "I added CRFG to spice up my life," he says.

After learning about and admiring other Rare Fruit Growers' gardens, he began to grow more exotic trees: mango, lychee, cherimoya, Asian pears, and more. His garden currently holds 29 fruit TREES, but so many more individual varieties because of grafting. Bill showed us so many photos from his garden it felt like we were walking through it in real time, even through a Zoom lens.

We admired the majestic avocado tree which overshadows his house, and which currently has over 400 fruits on it! It was planted in 1996, replacing an almond tree.

His first love was stone fruit, and his first fruit tree was an Alberta peach, but it required 700+ chill hours. He had no idea what chill hours were, and it died soon after he planted it. When he moved, he tried again and then discovered it needed 900 chill hours! That tree died also.

His current peach collection includes such varieties as Eve's Pride, Red Baron (which also grows awesome flowers), and others which work best with very low chill hours. (He gets 250 chill hours or less at his house.)

His trees sometimes suffer from peach leaf curl. One year he had a terrible infestation which looked horrible. He cut the branches back very harshly. Fortunately his trees were very healthy and the trees grew back without the disease.



A lot of stone fruit trees die at around 20 - 25 years of age. Bill recommends pruning yearly; he asserts that if you don't prune it you might as well not have it. He recommends thinning your crops so the fruits are 5-8" apart. This gives them room and energy to grow big.

To prune your fruit trees, start by cutting off the whips about 3 feet down, then thin the branches out for room and light. The result is improved light and air which improves the fruit production.

Moving on to apples, we saw Fuji, Orleans Reinette, Pink Pearl, Jonalicious, Dorsett Golden, Newton-Pippin, Braeburn, Jonagold, Spitzenberg and more! Many of them are grafted.

Bill loves his mangoes! His two favorite varieties are Keitt and Gold Coast. His Gold Coast used to produce tiny mangoes. He started thinning the tree and got better production but they still weren't very big. When he opened the husks he noticed there was no "bean" inside. (That's the seed.) He says that means they weren't pollinated, so this year he will hand pollinate his mango flowers.

When you grow mangoes, you need to be a weather watcher. If it gets cold, use tarps to keep them warm. Bill uses small heaters, such as old-fashioned Christmas tree lights, which provide just enough warmth to protect the tree, especially if it's young.

How tall do mango trees get? In tropics, they can grow up to 30 - 50 feet tall. For him, only the Thompson grows too high.

Can you grow mangoes in containers? Not so well. If you're really religious about water and feed, it's possible, but he wouldn't recommend it.

Bill grafts his mango in late spring (April).

We admired his grapevines, most of which originated



from our own CRFG-LA scionwood exchanges over the years. Bill loves the seedless Concord. But his favorite is the Jupiter grape - Bill recommends very heavy pruning for this variety.

Grapes produce pretty fast. If you plant them the first year, then the next year you get 1 bunch of grapes, and in

the second year you'll have many bunches. Try a little fertilizer, make sure they aren't shaded too much, and prune heavily. If they still don't produce well, graft a new variety onto it. (Bill is a great fan of grafting!)

In vineyards, grapevines are cut all the way back to the vertical and 1 or 2 horizontal branches with 1 bud each. Bill commented that grapes can change over time. His Shelby vine, which produces beautiful rainbow-colored leaves, tasted watery and weird this year. One year he had Cabernet Sauvignon grapes, and harvested enough to make wine! Sadly, now the neighborhood critters get most of his grapes.

When the house was younger and Bill's family was planning the pool deck, he negotiated with his wife: he will leave a hole for her fig tree if she lets him put a hole in for a mango. Deal!

The fig varieties in his yard now include Panache (which tastes better the older the tree gets), Figo Prato, Stroz, and Strawberry Verte.

Bill has two Asian pears, neither one of which is doing well right now. He grafted Baldwin onto the 20th Century and the graft is doing fine. Another pear hardly grew fruit. So he chopped it way back and grafted a Southern Bartlett onto it. (Three years later he got 40 pears, and now the same tree is putting out 200 pears!)

On the other hand, Bill has good luck with cherimoya, lychee, and papaya. The catch is, you have to hand-pollinate cherimoya in order to get fruit. Pollination is done in June. His cherimoya was a seedling from the Veith's "Ott" cherimoya, which rooted right through the pot! So he left it.



Someone wanted to know how much cold cherimoyas can take. Bill says if it's an established tree, California winters are no problem. He says if you whack a cherimoya way back after frost (even if it's damaged) then it will come back.

Bill promises some lovely scions for January.

He doesn't get many squirrels. His main predators are

rats, mice, possibly raccoons (something snaps the rat traps and eats the peanut butter and doesn't care at all). And, rarely, gophers. Lately, his traps have been less effective - something eats the peanut butter but don't go into the traps very often.

His best trick to protect the fruit is to literally bag them. He has a bunch of mesh bags for the purpose, and sometimes uses paper bags for larger fruits such as grapes. He buys his bags online - just Google "MESH BAGS." Trying to bag 400 avocados is a bit beyond his means, however.



When it comes to fertilizing, Bill is part of a local organic garden club and gets organic rabbit poop to spread under his trees. He also has a couple of compost heaps. When they're ripe and ready to use, he just top dresses his trees with compost. Everything gets fed compost and organic material, but it can be problematic. Organic matter reduces pH slightly, which is a problem for him. When he plants things; he adds some sulfur because his soil is too alkaline. Once he poisoned his garden with too much wood ash, and the poor plants couldn't take up the nitrogen at such a low pH, which measured above 8.0! Bill is very careful to use gloves and a mask and all sorts of PPE (personal protective equipment) when he applies sulfur.

He's not a water conservator. He is actually very generous with water, especially with lychees. (His lychees get rice hulls.)

We learned so much from Bill that day! He and Emory Walton even put together four wonderful grafting videos, with instructions how to do the four main types of grafting: Vee, T-Bud, Whip, and Whip-and-tongue.

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Bill, we thank you very much for sharing your day and your garden experience with us!

In Memoriam: Bernie & Miyako Storch

By Patricia Valdivia



It is with the saddest regret that we announce the deaths of our long-time CRFG members (more than 40 years) Bernie (Bernd) and Miyako Storch, who passed away July of this year.

Bernie and Miyako were one of those rare couples who spent almost their entire life together. Married for over 60 years, you would never see one without the other, and often they would even be dressed alike, with matching caps or identical shirts. Their wonderful life together took them to the far ends of the earth: from flying hot air balloons over the Swiss Alps to the most remote of destinations –Antarctica!

Twenty-five years ago, when we joined the Los Angeles Chapter of CRFG, we were fortunate enough to meet Bernie and Miyako and built a wonderful friendship with them. Over those years we learned so much about their dedication to nature, especially about cultivating cacti. Their collection of cacti numbered around 200 different types. They built a special greenhouse to house their collection. Even though the soil on their property in Santa Barbara, California was mostly rock, this did not stop them. They worked tirelessly to turn their backyard into a terraced paradise. As members of CRFG, they loved growing semi-tropical fruit. Visiting them you would find Lucuma, Green Sapote/ Pouteria Viridis, Granadilla, Inga, Cherimoya, Reed avocado, Pommelo, different varieties of Dragon Fruit, Macadamia, Palm Coquitos, Jaboticaba, many varieties of Citrus, Coffee, and so much more! Santa Barbara has the perfect weather for growing all of these tropical plants, but drought was a challenge. And so,

realizing the amount of water needed, Bernie built huge tanks under his house to collect rainwater.

They were very generous and they would always donate their extra fruit to various organizations.

Because of their abundance of fruit, Miyako was challenged on how to use them up. This led her to developing many creative recipes using these rare and wonderful fruits. Because of this culinary talent, Miyako was the Food Editor for our Fruit Gardener magazine for the last few years. You can find some of her specialties in the "From the Garden to the Table" articles.

Because he was German-born, when Bernie was a young man he chose to work in the auto industry specializing in German-made cars. The Volkswagen beetle was the one you would often see him driving. But he also had some very beautiful and classic German cars.

Their hard work, intelligence, and the love that they had for each other brought them much success and happiness in life. However, in their 80's their health quickly deteriorated.

The two of them, always side by side lived a long and happy life and now are resting in peace together. Even though they are no longer with us, we will always have wonderful memories of this great couple.

Classifieds

WANTED: Your gardens and ideas. CRFG-LA's Program Chair Anwar Hachachi is looking for a few good events. Would you be interested in sharing your garden for a tour in 2022? (Zoom or in person.) Do you know of any places to visit? Experts to teach us? Let him know!
program@crfg-la.org

OFFER: Young avocado tree. Animal Angels in Culver City has a Hass avocado tree that they can no longer care for and would like to offer it to anyone interested in (digging it up and) taking it home. It has only been in the ground for 1 year and is about 5-6 feet tall. Location is near Venice & Overland. If interested, please contact Our Animal Angels and ask about the avocado tree. Or email the newsletter editor for contact information: editor@crfg-la.org.