



# LOS ANGELES CHAPTER

2021 Volume XXVI Issue 5

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

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

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## ZOOM MEETING:

**Saturday, September 25, 10:00 am**

**Speaker: Dr. Niamh Quinn**

**Topic: Ground Squirrels in the home garden**

Are you sick and tired of squirrels eating all your fruit? Not sure what to do about it? Human-Wildlife Interactions Advisor, Dr. Niamh Quinn, will join us for a talk about how to deal with squirrels in our gardens. Bring all your questions! Having another issue? Join us & ask your question in the Q & A. Dr. Niamh Quinn received her Ph.D. in small mammal ecology at the National University of Ireland, Galway. She currently works out of the South Coast Research and Extension Center, and covers the Los Angeles and San Diego areas.

## ZOOM MEETING:

**Saturday, October 23, 10:00 am**

**Host: Bill Brandt**

**Topic: Virtual garden tour**

Bill Brandt's garden is enviable!!! Bill is a veteran CRFG-er and gardener. He is remarkably knowledgeable and effective in making fruits grow. He has been a longtime member of the Los Angeles Chapter squad that visited local schools to teach grafting (pre-pandemic). He also provides a grafting lecture at our Chapter's annual Scion Exchanges. Bill's orchard is impressive, with many types of thriving standard as well as exotic fruits, including beautiful and delicious lychees! Our October tour will be an inspiration and a great learning opportunity.

*Save the date!*

**CALENDAR FOR LA CHAPTER 2021**

Nov 20 Dr. Shengrui Yao - Jujubes

Dec 11 Holiday Party - !!ALERT!! NEW DATE!!

# Words From Our Chairman

By Jerry Schwartz



For over 100 years, Northridge was considered to be in Agricultural Zone 9B. To my surprise, upon ordering online plants, I learned my zip code is now 10A. What changes do I make in plant selections? Now, there is little chance that tender plants will freeze. No more days of 25 degree temperatures. Instead, my concern is now heat. Months of 90 to 120 degree temperatures. Heat, combined with water restrictions, present new fruit growing conditions. Lower chill hours will eliminate many stone fruit. Shade cloth may have to be used to reduce heat stress. Water rationing will reduce the number of plants one can grow.

CRFG members will meet these challenges and thrive!

By the way, Bruce Blavin informed me about AmazonSmile. Sign up for AmazonSmile, and Amazon will donate a portion of your purchases to your favorite charity - which is CRFG!

Jerry

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## LOOKING BACK

By Deborah Oisboid, Editor

### July 24- George Campos' Magical Garden Tour

If Disneyland were a tropical garden, it might look a lot like George Campos' yard. Although it's not as large as the Anaheim theme park, it's full of wondrous things, all clustered into their own "lands."

Move over "Main Street!" George has "The Mango Grove"! In the front yard, "The Pond" separates the

"English Rose Garden" from the "American Rose Garden." On the sides and in back are "The Spring," "The Swimming Hole," "The High Country," "The West Lawn," "The Farm Garden," and so much more! Not to mention "The Treehouse," which is still in the planning stages.

His yard is less than  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre, which is not that large, but it FEELS big for some reason. Possibly because the slope in the back provides more physical planting surface area than a flat map implies.

With a few dozen Chapter members watching via Zoom, and another 8 visiting in person, everyone enjoyed his hospitality and the beautiful tour.

George lives up against a hillside. When he moved in over 10 years ago, the yard was barren, and covered in concrete, rebar, and pavers, with fewer than half a dozen trees. (Most were pine trees way in the back.) He had to break up the concrete before he could even begin planting.

Now his yard boasts of multiple little gardens, each one with its own personality, most with fruit trees, and each



with its own brightly-painted sign and icon to identify them. Out in the "West Lawn" is a signpost with wooden arrows pointing towards the various gardens. (The only thing missing is distance to each garden is from the signpost!)

Let's start his tour in the front yard.

In addition to the rose gardens and the water feature, he has a Himalayan Cedar, a lucuma, a Cara-Cara orange, and a Carmen Haas avocado. Moving around to the side we encounter the amazing "Mango Grove," which contains 18 or 19 different varieties. To list a few: Sweet-Tart, M4 (a coconut-flavored mango), Fruit Punch, Lemon Zest, Sugarloaf, Super Julie, Orange Sherbet, Coconut Cream, Kryptonite (actually called "Kathy," but later renamed), and "Ugly Betty." He bought many of them from Florida nurseries, and he praises Walter Zill, who has been producing some of the most incredible, world-class mangoes for years in Boynton Beach, Florida.

Because we don't have ideal weather for mangoes, he waits a full three years before letting his trees fruit. This lets them establish a strong root system and produce excellent fruit.



At "The Spring" - named for the local hot tub plus several water features - is a Superdwarf Cavendish banana and several gorgeous plumeria. The CRFG members who were Zoomed in missed the wonderful scents. Aztec Gold smells like butter and peaches. The Cuban "Stenopetala" looks like a vine and has a

very strong jasmine fragrance. (Shown at left.)

Moving into the backyard proper we find "The Swimming Hole" (swimming pool), with a backdrop of "Kaleponi Pali," which is Hawaiian for "California Cliffs." He started planting all tropical trees, but some plants didn't like it, so now it's a mix of tropical and California natives.

But before we climb the hillside, we discover a strawberry guava, a tiny fig tree, a Teddy Bear palm with "fur" growing at the leaf base, a finger lime, a Brazilian tallow tree (which will only branch out after cold or heat damage), a Pencil palm, and a Flamethrower palm (huge crimson leaves when they emerge).

Walking around the pool, we note a canoe docked along one side. George originally purchased it for use in Yosemite and other rivers, but never used it there. Instead, he uses it at home! It's a lot of work and you have to paddle the entire time. He says, "Canoe!" and his three dogs come running to join the ride. A complete circle, too, no backtracking or three point turns.



The tour continues the hillside. There are stepping stones all the way up. He's been collecting stones for 10

years and plans the layouts himself. The first step up the hillside was a former chunk of sidewalk and he moved it to the backyard and cemented it in place. "Cousin" Julio helps with stonework and carrying rocks and stones uphill where they need to go.

Climbing the steps, we discover cannas, a flowering cherry, a cedar bay cherry, some goat nipple berry (which has not yet fruited), pineapple guava, hibiscus, butterfly bushes, calandrinia, Mexican bird of paradise, several palms, a Giant bird of paradise, a loquat, a weeping mulberry, and even a little mango tree.

All of the trees have different water needs. He tries to plant the ones with similar needs together, but is not always successful. He uses a Smart watering system - he can call out "High Country - three minutes water," and control everything from his phone that way.

Speaking of which, his "High Country" has a High Sierra theme. It is incomplete, but he plans to get busy with it next year. He plants to take advantage of the pine trees which were here before. He wants to build a "Treehouse," with a stream going through the "living room," a swinging bridge to connect to the "High Country," a mountain path, and a few granite steps.

We head back downhill, past the pool, and through a gate into the next yard: "The West Lawn." He admits the name may have been a mistake, because with dogs you don't get a lot of lawn growth. However, he has LOTS of fruit trees, plumeria, and citrus trees all around.

Some other exotics we saw: Guanabana/soursop (not yet planted), "Butterscotch" Sapodilla (tastes like pear doused in brandy), "Cotton Candy" mango (which is supposed to produce 3-pound fruits), and comfrey with leaves nearly as large as he is. He makes tea from the comfrey, although it smells awful and takes a while to ferment, but after one month you can use it.

We saw more delicious fruit trees: Gold Nugget Mandarin, Queen and Pinkerton and Sir Prize avocados, Myer lemon, an apricot tree which was covered with Passionfruit vines, longan, guava, Kishu mandarin, Yellow Long-Neck fig, Pat's Delight citrus (a cross between an orange and grapefruit), Mexican limon,



and Lemon Zest mango.

He comments on a Dwarf Puerto Rican plantain which is anything but small! His Boca Rose seems to like the plantain and grows right through it. (Right) Pineapples thrive in this area as well - it's all partial shade - and they produced three fruit this year!



George is cautious with mangoes and he was originally afraid that imported trees would be cold-sensitive. So his first trees were placed in the most protected area - and it turned out to be not the best place. What the trees really wanted was heat. His biggest problem is what he calls Sudden Death - the trees look fantastic one day and the next day they're half dead and there's nothing you can do. He has lost several trees this way. He discussed soil improvement. His is pretty bad. Some areas are more sandy, some more rocky. He is doing the Marjane technique of improving soil: raking it, adding soil improvements, and so on.

The other major challenge he has is CRITTERS.

Mangoes are their #1 favorite food. (Guavas are #2.)

Although he grew tons of guava fruits last year, he didn't get to eat any of them! This year he is planning to add a night-time red-eye night-light deterrent. He is also trying a moving scarecrow which flaps in the wind. He placed a cage around the best mangoes: 6-7 ft tall x 9 ft wide. Mesh bags successfully protect his avocados, but the critters eat right through them and leave the mango pits hanging on the tree.

He is growing something new: a native American tea called Yaupon. It has many purported health benefits, and also contains caffeine, but is relatively unknown in its home country. George first heard about it on the BBC news!

He is very proud of his Black/Chocolate Sapote tree, although the odd weather changes have confused it. The fruit has been on the tree for two years! Black sapote makes the most amazing chocolate milkshakes!

But wait, there's more! Over here are blackberry, cherimoya, Collard trees, zucchini, Swiss chard, eggplant, herbs, a white sapote, and yet another mango. We also see Cara Cara oranges, Valencia Pride and another Lemon Zest mango (he has them all over the place!), a lime, a Eureka lemon, A Puerto Rican plantain,

and some dragonfruit. Plus the "Mojito" garden which contains sugar cane, mint, and another lime tree.

There is even a home built Pizza oven! With basil & herbs nestled nearby, perfect for adding to dinner.

That's pretty much it. Any questions?



George, thank you very much for sharing your amazing garden with us!

## August - Ross Raddi's wonderful world of Figs

Living here in warm, drought-prone California, it's odd to hear someone say they want to live in a place "that's super awesome dry." But Ross Raddi doesn't live in California. He grows figs (and other plants) in the Philadelphia suburbs. (Those are ALL figs behind him!)



Although only 30, Ross is quite well known on the internet as a fig expert. He has multiple online platforms, including a YouTube channel ([www.youtube.com/rossraddi](http://www.youtube.com/rossraddi)), and blog ([www.figboss.com](http://www.figboss.com)), with tens of thousands of followers!

He is a consultant to people all over the world. His website says, "You can grow anything you want. Anywhere." And he can prove it. He has been a rare fruit grower for the last 7 years - not just figs but other fruit as well. (His other favorite is persimmons.) He loves that there is a passion for this kind of thing. His interest in growing figs was sparked when he was about 15 years old. His grandfather brought over several 4-foot-long branches, and stuck them into the ground in their back yard. Grandpa said the sticks will turn into fig trees. At that moment it planted a seed in Ross's mind that this is actually POSSIBLE.

When Ross was older, his basement flooded. After it had "dried" there was still a moldy smell. What gets rid of a bad smell? Plants! So he started growing house plants. Soon he thought, why just raise green plants, why not something to eat? His first thought was figs.

Figs like it warm and dry, which is a problem in Pennsylvania: his region is full of humidity and frozen winters. He believes some of his fruits could rival California fig fruits, but not all the time. Only when conditions are perfect. When that happens, he feels quite justified.

Why does he love figs so much? To his taste buds, they're one of the most incredible things he has ever tasted. Like jam on a tree. Some of them taste like cake. Others have flavors of berries, marshmallow, honey, maple syrup, and more. Figs produce their own nectar in the void, or eye of the fig. He calls it "Honey" because it's similar visually and in flavor.

Over the years, he has experimented with 100s of varieties, tested out various depths of planting, recorded how many hours of sunlight each tree receives, compared growing in containers vs in-ground, and tree proximity/spacing.

A lot of Ross' fruit trees are in pots, but he has more than 100 fig trees in the ground! He spaces the trunks 2 feet apart, which is pretty tight, but he only has 1/3 acre to work with. He prunes carefully so each individual tree and branch receives enough sunlight.

There are three major factors in growing the best crop of figs: Water (affects growth), Heat (affects metabolism), and Light (affects fruit formation).

Ross says water is the "on/off" switch for growth. If you want to switch a fig tree into GROWTH mode, give it water. To stop growth, stop watering. Figs are like

cactus; they can store water in their trunks and branches and fruits. In fact, figs can survive months without water. They will drop their leaves and go into preservation mode under extreme conditions, but can return to health with water.

If you water heavily after fruitset, the tree will store it in the fruit, diluting the sugars and resulting in a lower Brix score. (Brix is a measurement of sugar content. Figs typically fall into a range of 10 - 20, although Ross has seen some very sweet ones reach the 30's.)

Ross uses barriers around his trees' roots to minimize the dilution effects of his 40-inch rainfall. He always aims for that "sweet spot" of watering, to get the best Brix rating in his fruit. He recommends watering well early in the season (prior to fruitset), significantly decrease watering after fruitset, and water even less in the 3 months before winter. Make sure your watering is consistent - a lot of water at one time can make your figs prone to splitting.

Fruit drop could be due to lack of pollination, but might also be caused by lack of water.

Enough about water. What about sunlight? To maximize fig production, maximize the sunlight they receive. Fruit buds should get a minimum 8 hours of sunlight per day. He recommends espalier profiles (as if the tree is grown flat against a wall) as the best way to get sunlight to as many branches as possible.

Temperature: Figs like warm soil temperatures. Warm days improve their metabolism, enhancing growth. They can survive air temperatures of 0F and 100F for brief periods of time. His figs don't like 100F, but the majority of his figs can survive 5F in winter.

Fig flavor is very dependent on the weather. More heat at time of ripening (below 95F) means a better quality



fig. (At this point, Ross looked out his own window and noted it is in the mid 70's, rainy, and dreary. He expects his figs to be terrible for a while.) He gets frustrated by his very high humidity. More humidity = lower quality fruits. Ross

always tries to harvest his figs when it is dry outside. The best quality fruit he's gotten were harvested when the days were in the low to mid 90's, and nighttime

temperatures in the low 70s.

Figs grow on the new branches of each season. Fruits form in 3 stages. Small, pea-size fruits expand to a particular size, and stay there for about 30 days until a second swell occurs - almost overnight. Then they stagnate at this third size. If it looks like they're not doing anything, they may be in a stagnation phase.

Figs ripen 60 - 130 days after buds appear or after pinching/pruning. If it's cloudy and dreary, try to increase soil temperature. California growers might see figs as early as February or March, but Ross doesn't see them start until early June. However, both east and west coast figs all seem to ripen about the same time of year (August).

To know when to harvest figs, pay attention to the neck (not the stem) of the fruit. People get this wrong all the time. If you see latex dripping from a cut stem, the fig is not fully ripe. The main thing to look for is if the neck is fully soft and ripe.

Pruning is good any time of the year, but it's best to wait until the sap flow returns to the roots and there is very little in the branches. (Sap contains carbohydrates and sugars and are good for the health of the tree - you don't want to lose a lot of sap!)

One way to open a canopy is to rub off some new growth at the very beginning of the season. Observe the direction each bud will grow, and finger prune to open up the canopy to sunlight.

Generally, summer fruit tree pruning removes 1/3 - 1/2 of the canopy, to maintain the height you want. But that's not appropriate for figs because fruit is on the new growth!

So use pinching to remove the apical (top) bud without removing the lower (potential) fruit.



Rejuvenation pruning is a more extreme form. It focuses on improving the health of mature trees, especially those infected with mosaic virus. Prune off damaged (mosaic-infested) branches. You can cut fig trees all the way down to the base and it will bounce back the next year. If you're too harsh, yes you can kill the tree. On the other hand, if you cut them back to almost nothing, excavate and expose the roots, you will

encourage adventitious buds/suckers to grow from the roots. These will be EXREMELY healthy, practically virus-free. Select the best sucker as the new trunk of the tree.

We learned there are four classes of fig: Common, San Pedro, Smyrna, and Caprifig. The San Pedro type called "Desert King" grows a great breba crop! ("Breba" is a "preliminary" crop, not the main one.) A Smyrna type he recommends for California: "Inchario Preto," sometimes called "Unknown Pasteliere" or "Black Madeira." It has an incredible berry flavor, like eating wine!

Fig propagation is mostly done by cuttings and grafting, not usually by seeds. Over the years, Ross has investigated an incredible quantity of different fig varieties, and he developed his own special spreadsheet listing the types and characteristics that he has noticed. He shared the spreadsheet with us at the meeting. In it, he lists the figs he has evaluated for such features as breba production, temperature swings, low light growth, short hang time, pest resistance, difficulty to establish, and much, much more.

If you have a fruit that you really like, Ross recommends grafting it onto EFI 3 rootstock. We learned Root knot nematode-resistant rootstocks (LSU Purple, LSU Tiger) usually grow best in southern soils. The more vigorous a rootstock, the more productive the tree. Dwarf varieties, such as Little Ruby, can be found online. He's had his in the ground for 3 years. It's good if you want a smaller tree.

He advises fertilizing before fruitset. Time your feeding with future crops in mind. Include trace nutrients & minerals. Figs love calcium & magnesium. He's a fan of silica - it offers good disease resistance to rust.

Figs can handle a wide range of pH - 6.7 to 7.5. His native soil is about 6.7. He has grown figs in containers with pH above 7.5 but doesn't recommend that. He has seen figs with a 4" layer of lime on top! (Although he would suggest the lime be put underneath where the roots can more easily access it.)

Figs are actually inverted flowers. Inside the skin are hundreds of achenes ("uh-KEENS"), which are soft internal stems, each of which grows a seed. The longer they are, the more texture to the fruit. If achenes are sticky, the flavor is more like jam. If thicker and drier, the flavor is more reminiscent of cake.

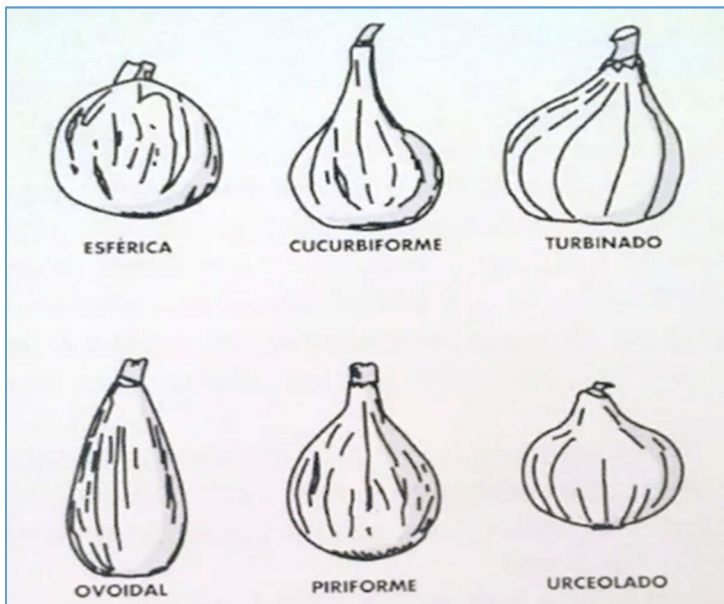
We learned some figs are pollinated by a "fig wasp." The

wasp crawls into a fig, picks up pollen from the Achenes, and brings it to the next one over. Pollination increases the size and quality of fruit but is not relied upon.

Figs have 6 major shapes:

- Spherical
- Cucurbitiform
- Turbinate (top-shaped)
- Ovoid
- Pyrifiform (pyramid-shaped)
- Urciolate (urn-shaped)

(Image is in Portuguese, from Montserrat Pons).



The rounder the fruit, the worse it does in rain, worse with splitting, worse with shedding water. Splitting is caused by too much rain/water, as fruit expand too fast.

Urn-shaped figs don't usually hang with their open eye down, and if it rains, it's more susceptible to collecting water, expanding, and splitting. Ross love the Ovoid profile, which sheds water very well for him. Water does not get trapped in the eye.

He thinks interior fig color may be related to flavor

- Brown color = "figgy" flavor
- Yellow = caramel flavor
- White/amber = honey or brown sugar
- Redder = more berry flavor

Ross has many "favorite" fig varieties, but it's not all about taste for him. There are so many varieties, and they're all so great, unless a variety outperforms significantly he's not going to say it is a favorite. And it takes a long time to evaluate - years! There are so many variables. (His spreadsheet helps a lot!) Ross bases his

judgement on the following characteristics:

1. Ripening period (keep it short or ruin by rain!)
2. Superior rain resistance, split resistance, crack resistance, weather change resistance.
3. Hang time (short term is better for him). Hang time is the number of days between figs changing color and being ripe enough to pick. Too long a hang time is a problem because a pest can take it away. (Example: Calimyrnas take 20-30 days, rain will ruin the fruit.)
4. Drying performance
5. Figs continue to ripen in spite of environment

Here are his Top 8 from the end of last year's season:

1. "Verdino del Nord"
2. "Neruccio d'Elba"  
(These first two dry so very well!)
3. "Smith"
4. "Hative d'Argentile" (does well in rain)
5. "Moro de Caneva" (long oval, long stem. dries into the sweetest "fig candy")
6. "Rossellino" (used as dried figs in Tuscany. similar to Hardy Chicago)
7. "Hardy Chicago"
8. "Campaniere" (dries on the tree and continues to ripen even when it's raining)

You may have noticed a trend here. Ross loves dried figs: he never even tasted a fresh fig until he was 23!

One of Ross's favorite references is Montserrat Pons, Fig Trees of the Boleric Islands. There is a lot of information about fig growing, fig trials, experiments, soil types, and so on.

<https://monserratpons.com/>

<https://translate.google.com/translate?hl=&sl=es&tl=en&u=https%3A%2F%2Fmonserratpons.com>

And a favorite website for trees is is Edible Landscaping in Virginia. (<https://ediblelandscaping.com/>) They carry an incredible variety of standard figs. All of them are pretty darned good! Some of the rarest varieties you find elsewhere aren't much better than a \$7 tree standard.

Ross only recently heard of the Black Fig Fly. He knows it started in Europe and is now infecting trees here in the United States. It affects fruits, creates holes, and causes fruit drop. Pay attention to it. Other fig pests include scale, spider mite, ants, and slugs. He cautions growers to pay close attention to the wood of the tree, look for borer holes when pruning.

Ross shares plant material with friends all over the country. [FigBid.com](http://FigBid.com) is a great place to find new, rare (and unproven?) varieties. Ross notes that sometimes you can't be certain what variety a tree is. Nurseries might mislabel or rename them! He believes the most accurate identification will come from a hobbyist!

He's only been growing figs intensely for over 7 years. Very soon he will sell fruits, but not this year. He hopes to sell commercially. He wants to continue to promote and spread the good word.

Oh, and regarding his grandfather's plants from 15 years ago? Sadly, Dad didn't like wasps and was afraid of bees, so they got ripped up. However, he is growing other trees now.

Loaded with an incredible amount of new knowledge, our chapter members were eager to tend their own trees after this marvelous presentation. We thank Ross Raddi very much for sharing his amazing knowledge and expertise with us!



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## In Memoriam: Anna Bruni

Our longtime member, Anna Bruni Benson, passed away Nov. 7, 2020, at 94, at her home in Brentwood. She was an accomplished, elegant, sweet lady who brought to our potluck table carefully crafted baked items (featured in one or another of her cookbooks). Her gentle, modest manner indicated nothing at all of the range of her experiences.

Anna was born in Venice, Italy, where she earned a doctorate in foreign languages and literatures. Moving to Los Angeles in the late 50's, she earned a Master's

degree and another doctorate at UCLA in Italian, French and Spanish languages and literatures (with a major in theater). She taught, developed theater productions, and was head of the Italian Program at CSUN for decades.

She married theater, film and TV director John Brahm, with whom she lived in Malibu, where they raised daughters Mara Lee Maltauro and Sumishta Brahm. After divorcing in 1960, she moved to Laurel Canyon. In 1962, Anna married L.A. Times art critic Henry J. Seldis, and welcomed her third child, Mark Seldis. Henry Seldis died in 1978. Later, Anna married Sidney Benson, a renowned scientist and inventor. They lived in Brentwood, where Mr. Benson died at 93 in 2011.

Through life, Anna published several books—one on Italian desserts, another one on "The Italian Vegetable Garden," one of poetry, and then "The Lion and the Swastika," about her life in Europe during WWII. She treasured her children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, skiing, her garden, animals, and, happily, CRFG!

To us in the chapter, Anna was memorable simply for being a loving and generous lady, and it was very nice to know her!

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## Classifieds

**WANTED:** Tom Del Hotal Needs Your Help!  
Tom, an avid member of the SanDiego CRFG chapter, recently moved to Washington State and found a scarcity of information on what varieties of fruit trees will grow in the Olympic Peninsula. He would also like to know which varieties work for you on the Central Coast. If you live in, or know people who grow in Arroyo Grande, Templeton, San Luis Obispo, Santa Maria, etc., please let Tom know:

- Fruit Tree type (apple, fig, etc.)
- Variety
- Central Coast location

...so he gets an idea of your microclimate. You can send any helpful information to [editor@crfg-la.org](mailto:editor@crfg-la.org), and we will forward it to Tom. Thanks in advance!