

THE MEDITERRANEAN GARDEN SOCIETY

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA BRANCH

An international forum devoted to furthering knowledge and appreciation of plants and gardens suited to the mediterranean climate regions of the world

issue 14
Fall 2003



the garden of Phil Van Soelen of California Flora Nursery, Fulton, California
photo by Saxon Holt (www.SaxonHolt.com)

A SONOMA COUNTY GARDEN TOUR FOR MEDITERRANEAN PLANT NUTS!

Saturday, September 6th, 10am – 4pm
\$25 per person

Get some ideas about what looks good at the end of our mediterranean summer in two Sonoma county gardens! On this special tour you'll get to see two private gardens, one large and one small, each tended faithfully by dedicated and knowledgeable plantsmen. We'll also visit two exceptional nurseries, Western Hills and Cal Flora. Western Hills, of course, has its own spectacular garden and the owner is excited about our visit. Phil van Soelen, co-owner of Cal Flora and Advisory Board member of our Mediterranean Garden Society Branch, will not only be sharing his own garden, but also his newest enthusiasms. It all adds up to one delightful day. Bring your own lunch; we'll have snacks and drinks along the way.

**Space is extremely limited, so reserve your space right away
by calling Sue Ann Manners at 925-254-0226.**

An interesting FALL garden tour this year, to illustrate that even after our warm & dry summers, our gardens can still hold much of interest and beauty.

Also in this issue, much information about figs, including a recipe. Figs have long been a part of the Bay Area – there is a tree in San Jose, planted behind the Roberto Adobe (770 Lincoln Ave, now the Law Offices of Richard Arzino), which was built around 1835. The tree is believed to have been planted around the same time (making it 168 yrs old!) and still bears a copious crop each year.

Hope to see you on the garden tour!

Seán O'Hara & Nancy Swearengen

Fall is the best time for planting in the Bay Area

As the weather starts to the cool, and the rain cycle starts anew, many plants come out of the semi or complete dormancy that helped them through the warm, dry summer. It is best to plant or transplant during active growth, and the most active growth in our climate takes place during fall/winter. Even if there is only moderate leafy top growth, you can be sure that roots continue to grow throughout our relatively mild (even for deciduous plants!) winters.

Studies at the Univ. of Calif. Davis have shown that a tree planted in spring is ill prepared to get through the following summer, not having had the time to establish a robust new root system. Even with supplemental irrigation, such a tree experiences a severe setback. The same tree, planted the following fall, easily establishes itself with the onset of rains and cooler temperatures. Even though in the ground only half as long, the fall-planted tree still outstrips the earlier planted one by the following year!

Optimal fall planting can be done from Oct. through Dec., depending upon when the rains begin. During our many dry winter periods, some supplemental irrigation may be needed for certain species, but many mediterranean species may not require more than one irrigation at planting time and possibly none (or minimal) during the dry season!



Figs

Native to Asia Minor, *Ficus carica*, is grown for its edible fruit. Figs were imported into the Mediterranean area and used by the Egyptians 6000 years ago. An important food in Greek and Roman cultures, figs were brought to California by the Franciscans around 1770.

Commercial cultivation of figs in California began in the early 20th century.

Figs are deciduous and fast-growing to a height of 15 to 25 feet with an equal spread. Figs are undemanding and drought-tolerant, but they need protection where frost is common. They are ideal summer shade trees and ornamental in winter with their beautiful branching patterns and smooth gray bark. Figs may be grown in large containers or used as an espalier on a fence or wall. It is best to avoid planting figs over a deck or patio where they may drop fruit.

There are many varieties of figs to choose from, and most need heat to bear fruit. Garden figs need no pollinating, and trees will usually bear two crops a year. Smyrna figs require a special pollinating wasp and are not recommended for home gardens. Select a variety to suit your climate, and pick the fruits as they ripen. Birds also enjoy eating the fruits in season.

Katherine Greenberg

A Sampling of Fig Varieties

(list courtesy of California Rare Fruit Growers)

Note – 'breba crop' refers to the first fruit crop that appears with the leaves in spring

- Adriatic** (Fragola, Strawberry Fig, Verdona, White Adriatic) - Origin central Italy, Small to medium, skin greenish, flesh strawberry colored. Good, all-purpose fig. Light breba crop. Large vigorous tree leafs out early; subject to frost damage. Prune to force new growth.
- Black Jack** – Large, long purple fruit, strawberry colored flesh, very sweet. Naturally dwarf in habit (easily kept under 6-8ft), heavy producer.
- Black Mission** (Beers Black, Franciscan, Mission) - Origin Balearic Islands. Fruits all-over black purple, elongated, Flesh watermelon to pink, fairly good taste. Easily dried at home. Single best all-round variety for south, north, coast, interior. Brebas prolific, fairly rich. Tree very large, plant at maximum spacing. Do not prune after tree reaches maturity. Commences growth midseason.
- Blanche** (Italian Honey fig, Lattarula, Lemon, Peter's Honey fig, White Marseille) - Medium to large, skin yellowish green, flesh white to amber, very sweet, lemon flavor. Light breba crop. Valuable in short-season, cool-summer areas. Slow growing, dense, hardy tree.
- Brown Turkey** (Aubique Noire, Black Spanish, Negro Largo, San Piero - Origin Provence. Medium, skin is purplish brown, flesh pinkish amber. Good flavor. Best when fresh. Light breba crop. Small, hardy, vigorous tree. Prune severely for heaviest main crop.
- Celeste** (Blue Celeste, Honey Fig, Malta, Sugar, Violette) - Small to medium, skin is light violet to violet-brown, flesh reddish amber. Sweet, usually dried. Light breba crop. Tightly closed eye. Small, productive, hardy.
- Conadria** - Origin Ira Condit, Riverside 1956. First artificial hybrid fig. Fruit pale green, medium, flesh strawberry red. Mildly sweet. Good fresh, excellent dried. More productive than Adriatic but of lesser quality. Light breba crop. Tree vigorous, tends to excessive growth under irrigation, best in hot climates.
- Desert King** (Charlie, King) - Origin Madera, Calif. 1920. Large, skin is deep green, minutely spotted white, pulp strawberry red. Sweet, delicious fresh or dried. Commonly matures good fruit without caprification near the coast. Tree highly vigorous. Hardy, best adapted to cool areas.
- Excel** - Origin W.B. Storey, Riverside, 1975. Large, skin is yellow, flesh light amber. Fruits practically neckless, blocky. Very sweet. Excellent, all-purpose fig. Light breba crop. Similar to Kadota but more productive. Tree vigorous, even rank. Does well in most parts of California.
- Janice Seedless Kadota** - Large, skin is yellowish green, flesh amber, practically no seeds. Prolonged harvest, suitable for coastal and inland gardens.
- Judy** - Origin Leonard Jessen, Pasadena, 1986. Probable seedling of California Brown Turkey. Large and broad, fruit is brown to black, pulp pink.
- Kadota** (Dottato, Florentine, White Kadota) - Medium, skin is yellowish green, flesh amber, tinged pink at center. Flavor rich. Resists souring. Little or no breba crop. Tree upright, requires annual pruning to slow growth. Requires hot, dry climate for best quality.
- Len** - Origin Leonard Jessen, Pasadena, 1984. Seedling of Black Mission. Fruit smaller than Mission, black, pulp pink, quite sweet.
- Osborne Prolific** - large, skin is purplish brown, flesh amber, especially pleasant flavor. A favorite for coastal area but performs well inland also. Easily pruned into any shape.
- Panachee** (Striped Tiger, Tiger) - Small to medium, skin is greenish yellow with dark green strips, flesh strawberry, dry but sweet. Best fresh. No breba crop. Requires long, warm growing season. Ripens late.
- Genoa** (White Genoa) - Medium, skin is greenish yellow to white, flesh yellow-amber. Sweet, good fresh or dried. Light breba and main crops. Tree upright, requires constant annual pruning. Best adapted to cooler regions. Very late, continuing to ripen even after first frosts.
- Ventura** - Large, skin is green, flesh deep red, long neck. Excellent flavor. Good fresh or dried. Good breba crop. Ripens late but matures well in cool areas. Compact.
- Verte** (Green Ischia) - Small, skin is greenish yellow, flesh strawberry. Excellent fresh or dried Good breba crop. Small tree. Recommended for short-summer climates.

If fig trees are not available at your local nurseries, you might try sources:

Vintage Gardens, 2833 Old Gravenstein Highway South, Sebastapol, CA 95472

(707) 829-2035, www.vintagegardens.com

- has espaliered figs by Apple Art Espalier.

Bay Laurel Garden Center, 2500 El Camino Rea, Atascadero, CA 93422

(805) 466-3449, www.baylaurelnursery.com

- has an enormous selection of fruit trees.

Mail order Nurseries:

Burnt Ridge Nursery, Onalaska WA, (360) 985-2873,

landru.myhome.net/burntridge/

Greer Gardens, Eugene, OR, (800) 548-0111, www.greergardens.com

Raintree Nursery, Morton WA, (360) 496-6400, www.raintreenursery.com

Calendar of Events

September 6th (Saturday) 10am-4pm, **Sonoma** *

MGS Sonoma County Garden Tour for Plant Nuts – see front page of this newsletter for details.

September 13th-14th (Saturday-Sunday), **Berkeley**

Going Native Through the Four Seasons - Symposium on native plants with Russ Beatty, Joe Dahl, Steve Edwards, David Fross, Bert Johnson, Glenn Keator, Bart O'Brien, and Phil Van Soelen; Regional Parks Botanic Garden. For details, call Glen Keator: (510) 527-9802 or visit www.nativeplants.org/symposium.html.

September-October

California Native Plant Society (CNPS) – A variety of plant sales are happening this time of year – check with your local CNPS chapter for detail about sales in your area: (916) 447-2677, cnps@cnps.org, www.cnps.org

October 4th-5th (Saturday-Sunday), **San Francisco**

The Second Annual Infiorata: The Flowering of Italian Culture - A display of floral carpet mosaics made entirely of flower petals, as part of a Gardens Festival at Yerba Buena Gardens, between Mission and Howard, 3rd and 4th streets, San Francisco, (415) 989-6426.

October 19th (Sunday), **Siena, Italy** *

MGS Annual General Meeting (International) – Members who have not booked but who wish to attend should notify Carol Smith (Italian Branch Chair) as soon as possible and not later than **September 19th** (Podere Tolle 1, 171 Scrofiano, 53040 SI, Italy. Tel/fax 011 39 0577 661 400, john@ntc.it). We regret that places on the AGM excursions have already been filled.

October 20th (Monday) 7:15pm, **San Francisco**

Botany in South Africa at 60 Miles Per Hour – California Horticultural Society, A presentation by Betsy Clebsch, Jana Olson, David Feix, Allison Graff, Robin Parer, and Richard Ward. Admission \$5, County Fair Building, Strybing Arboretum & Botanical Gardens, Ninth Avenue at Lincoln Way, (415) 566-5222.

* MGS sponsored event

figs on a plate
by Zacarias Cerezo
www.zacariascerezo.com



Recipes:

🌀 **Broiled Fresh Figs with Raspberries**

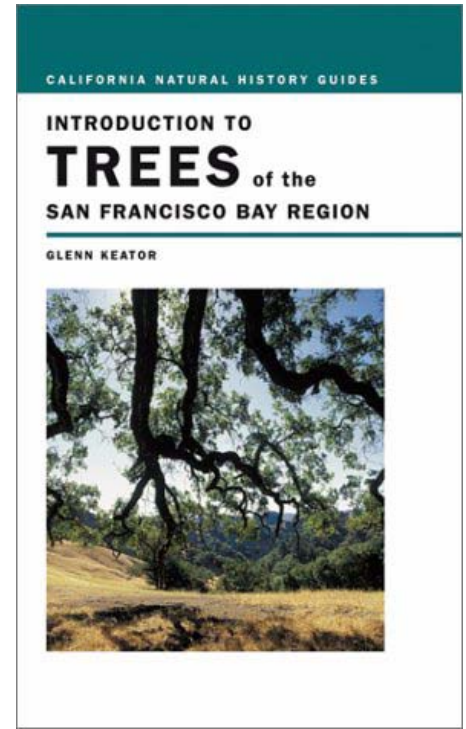
Wash carefully one basket of whole fresh figs, such as Turkish, Kodota, or Black Mission and cut in half. Place on a baking sheet, cut side up. Broil in the oven for 1-2 minutes until slightly softened. Remove from the oven and sprinkle generously with fresh raspberries and brown sugar. Return to the oven and broil until the sugar is caramelized (watch it carefully as the sugar can suddenly burn). Serve warm with a dollop of Crème Fraiche (recipe follows).

(from Sue Ann Manners)

🌀 **Crème Fraiche**

In a large-mouth mason jar, put 1/2 cup cream and 1/2 cup sour cream. Mix lightly with a fork (do not over mix). Cover and leave out in a cool place for 8-12 hours. Mix lightly again. Cover and refrigerate for 24 hours. Best tasting after 36 hours.

(from Jacques Pepin via Seán O'Hara)



Introduction to Trees of the San Francisco Bay Region Glenn Keator

University of California Press, 2002
(www.ucpress.edu)

Glenn Keator, author of a number of excellent books about the native plants of California, has written a useful guide to trees of the nine counties of the Bay Area and adjacent Monterey and Mendocino Counties. Because the San Francisco Bay Region enjoys a mild mediterranean climate, which allows us to grow an enormous number of different kinds of trees, this book is limited to naturally occurring trees, trees that grow on their own in the wild and in reserves and natural parklands.

Arranged by family, the description of each tree includes its life cycle, size, growth pattern, leaf characteristic, flowers and fruits, and one or more color photos of each. The guidebook also includes easy-to-use keys and a map with selected sites to observe Bay Area trees. This is an authoritative field guide for naturalists as well as for gardeners who want to learn more about of trees growing in the region and their natural habitats.

Katherine Greenberg



Free, To A Good Home! Tom MacIvor, who has been gardening in the South Bay for 50 yrs, is offering interested mediterranean gardeners his "Mediterranean Onions". He acquired only one or two plants 40 years ago, sought their identity for many years, and finally had them identified under this name by a local newspaper garden columnist. In conversation with him, it seems likely that these plants are *Urginea maritima*, the Mediterranean Sea Onion or Sea Squill (pictured at left). The bulbs are huge (up to the size of a basketball), and in autumn the white flower are borne on stems a spectacular 6 feet tall (the bulbs are dormant over the summer). If you would like to add one or two of these to your plant collection, Tom would be happy to share them.

The only catch is that you have to go and dig them out Yourself - call Tom at (408) 377-4203 and make a date!

This non-edible "onion", native to the Mediterranean Basin and the Canary Islands, has been used for various medicinal purposes since antiquity. The large bulbs are very efficient storage organs for summer dormancy and the roots can find a source of subterranean moisture in difficult stony soils. The leaves are apparently very attractive to snail/slugs so baiting may be required (use the flaked granules, a very tiny amount spread routinely over a long time).

Seán O'Hara

Urginea maritima (L.) Baker (drawing by the late Derek Toms)

We invite you to join the **Mediterranean Garden Society** to learn more about gardening in our unique and desirable climate. Memberships are for the calendar year (Jan-Dec), and all members receive the Society journal, **The Mediterranean Garden**, which contains articles written by members worldwide. If you join mid-year, you will receive all journal issues for that year.

Annual membership is ~~\$30~~
Life membership is ~~\$300~~
Send your personal check or credit card information to:
The MGS Secretary
Sparoza, P.O.Box 14
GR-190 02 Peania, GREECE
(International letter postage is 80€)

tel/fax: (30 1) 664 3089
email: bd@hol.gr

Payment of dues for the Mediterranean Garden Society includes you in this Branch if your address is within our range or if you specify branch inclusion directly on the membership form. You can join at any of our events or send your application separately. For a membership form, contact Sue Ann Manners, (925) 254-0226, or visit the MGS web site:

www.MediterraneanGardenSociety.org

This newsletter is produced in **Fall, Winter, & Spring** (dormant in Summer) to announce the events and news of the No. Calif. Branch of the MGS
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