



LOS ANGELES CHAPTER

2025 Volume XXX Issue 5

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

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MEETING

Topic: Biocontrol & Beneficial Insects presented by Ron Whitehurst

Date: Saturday, September 27, 10:00 a.m.

Location: Sepulveda Garden Center
16633 Magnolia Ave, Encino

Ron Whitehurst is a specialist in biological pest control and restoration of agro-ecosystems. His lively discussions about insect lifecycles and predator-prey relationships make the principles of biocontrol easy to understand for both laypersons and technical audiences. He is a member of the California Sustainable Pest Management Work Group, working with 25 stakeholders to develop a pathway to a future with less use of toxic pesticides. Ron has promoted organic methods of farming and gardening for over 40 years. Since 1997, he has taught how to create and manage ecosystems which minimize and control pests using insect habitats, cultural methods, beneficial insects, and soft pesticides when needed. An avid gardener, he loves making compost, building soil, and creating bio-intensive food producing landscapes.

There will be a small plant sale after the presentation has ended. Also, it's potluck time again! Everyone please bring a snack which can be shared after the presentation.

MEETING

Topic: Patio Tree & Small Space Gardening for the Kitchen, with Ashley Irene of heirloompotager.com

Date: Saturday, October 25, 10:00 a.m.

Location: Sepulveda Garden Center
16633 Magnolia Ave, Encino

Ashley calls herself an artist and her canvases are landscapes. She believes the most beautiful landscapes are created with edible plants rather than traditional ornamental varieties — or at the very least using a combination of the two. She is a Certified Garden Designer with over 30 years of gardening experience. Online, she is the "Heirloom Potager." She designs year-round, seasonal kitchen gardens for home cooks and culinary professionals in Southern California. Each design is unique, but they all include heirloom fruits, vegetables, herbs, and flowers which can be harvested for fresh and healthy meals. From container gardens to raised beds to full garden landscapes, she has a garden design waiting to please your taste buds.

All members, please bring something to share for the potluck following this presentation.

Save the date!

CALENDAR FOR L.A. CHAPTER 2025

November 22 Your Best Avocado Harvest, presented by chapter member Kevin Kratzer

December 20 Holiday Party at Sepulveda Gardens

LOOKING BACK

By Deborah Oisboid

July 26 - "Real Organic Gardening"

Everything you thought you knew about organic gardening is wrong.

That is what Randy and Nora Richie were trying to convey at their presentation to our chapter in July. In a nutshell, they said that everything which goes into the compost is what you get out of the compost. But there may be a LOT of things you don't expect.



Randy grew up in Pacific Palisades, California, and graduated from Pepperdine University in Malibu. He later worked as a garden designer, creating the first "eco-landscape" company in Los Angeles. They eventually had several very rich clients in Hollywood and Beverly Hills

In the 1980's customers and clients started asking how to grow things holistically. And the more he learned, the more he realized the key was in the dirt. Compost!

Randy met with Alan York of Apricot Lane Farms (from the movie "The Biggest Little Farm") and tried buy some compost for a landscaping project he was working on. Alan said no. He wanted to show off EVERYTHING. In particular, Alan showed off his insectary. He said if Richie puts an insectary in all of his landscaping jobs, it would become the signature of his landscaping group.

When Randy finally got to see Alan's compost he put his hands in the dirt. He told us it was an out-of-body experience for him. He said he could feel the microbes moving around in his hand. True biodynamic dirt. Dirt with real life in it!

Alan taught Randy how to create biodynamic compost, and how to use compost tea to feed dying plants. When Randy returned to his landscaping company, his workers thought he was crazy to think dirt would help bring dying plants back to life. But when the plants started to leaf out and grow healthy again, they didn't think he was so crazy after all.

Randy was won over on the concept of biodynamic compost, and eventually started a company called "Malibu Compost," with the mission to bring healthy, "true organic" soil to the world.

He told us about Rudolph Steiner who is known as the grandfather of organic gardening in the 1920's. Steiner would add homeopathic inoculants of organic materials to compost to accentuate performance.

Randy talked about origins of the USDA Organic Program, which he said does not address food safety or nutrition. For one thing, the National Organic program allows conventional manures to be used in organic food production.

What's wrong with conventional manure? Compost input equals nutrition output. Whatever goes into the compost will end up in your garden.

The biggest source of manure in the United States comes from poultry farming. Randy says conventional manure is not organic because the chickens are given *GMO* feedstocks, and the fowl are often sprayed with pesticides and fungicides to prevent diseases.

Guess what chickens poop out, and guess what ends up going into "organic" compost? He notes that the heat generated during the composting process is not enough to break everything down. There will still be some residue.

Randy also downplayed what he called the "green waste scam." The city collects green waste, chips it down, composts it, and hands it back to anyone who wants it. However, you have no idea what has gone into that compost. It could contain pesticides, *GMO*'s, petroleum products, and other non-organic materials.

At one point, Randy said the process to mass-produce nitrogen for fertilizer moved us too far away from "real organic" farming. This caused some friction with one of the CRFG chapter members who pointed out modern agriculture could not have come as far as it has without the mass production of nitrogen. The Haber-Bosch process, which produces the vast majority of nitrogen for fertilizer and other products, has been used for over 100 years. (See the following article on page 5.)

After a lively dispute, the presentation continued.

One thing Randy kept emphasizing was how important it was for a garden and the food it produces to be truly organic. Can you be sure there are no pesticides, no herbicides or fungicides in the food? Even the water supply has some chemicals added to it. He said many products we use actually kill the soil biology. Some add

toxins into the garden which make their way into our food. Randy and Norma avoid this by never using meat and bone meal because the food given to the animals is typically either genetically modified (GMO) or full of chemicals. In fact, 98% of the alfalfa grown in the United States is GMO, while conventional animal feed products have herbicides and pesticides in them.

His answer to "faux organic" is "biological" gardening.

When someone asks him what he's growing in his garden, he answers: *microbes*! He does everything to encourage a thriving biological culture: composting, amending, green mulching, top-dressing, beneficials, and compost teas. The goal is not to have the biggest and reddest tomatoes; the goal is to have the best biology in the dirt.

Steps of REAL Organic Gardening

- Composting - feeding the soil biology
- Amending - feeding the soil biology
- Green Mulching - feeding the soil biology
- Top-dressing - feeding the soil biology
- Beneficial's - saving the soil biology
- Compost Teas - feeding the soil biology

What is biological compost? It starts with bacteria which make the basic building blocks of soil. First, bacteria eat decomposing matter. Then protozoa eat the

bacteria. And then nematodes eat the protozoa. It slowly moves up the food chain from microarthropods such as mites and centipedes, up to earthworms, all creating a lively and viable environment for growth.

California has excellent bacteria in the soil, but fungal strands (hyphae) break things down and decompose, so the local bacteria constantly need to be replenished.

Plants grow roots into the ground. The roots send out exudates (fluid secretions) to attract microorganisms. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plant_root_exudates) Each exudate attracts or repels a different variety of bacteria or fungi. The bacteria come over to eat the exudates, and up the food chain it goes. All of the critters in the chain poop out what they ate in exactly the form and nutrients that the plant wanted in the first place. THAT's what Randy calls "real organic."

He never uses fertilizer. And his plants never complain because they have everything they need in the dirt.

In January 2025, more than 62 square miles of the Pacific Palisades and Eton Canyon burned. Winds blowing over 30-40 mph caused airborne debris such as PCB's, lithium, and ash to fall over hundreds of square miles of land. That's a lot of land! What will it take to clean up? Randy was already working on a book on how to detoxify

soil when the fires exploded onto the scene. He started putting his energy into helping others remediate their soil, and the book was published as "Soil Remediation for the LA Fires."

Randy told us if the soil is biodynamic there's less need to worry about metals in the soil. He told us bacteria have a sticky exterior called "polysaccharides." Metal ions become attached to the bacterial walls, keeping it buried in the soil, preventing it from moving to the surface where it can harm us humans. His solution to heavy metals in the soil is to add bacteria and that will mitigate the issue.

To clear out the toxins, he likes SLF-100, which is an enzyme developed to break down salt and other toxins from hydroponic systems. Another helpful thing is the yellow-white stuff which grows in a compost. Although it looks like a fungus, it is a very useful bacterium called *Actinomyces*. (*Actinomyces* are a "nitrogen-fixing" bacterium, capable of breaking the bonds of nitrogen atoms. Once those bonds are broken, that nitrogen takes a more plant-usable ammonium or nitrate form.)

The Richies' company Malibu Compost still makes exactly the same compost that Alan York taught Randy more than 17 years ago. They test for GMO's, herbicides and pesticides before anything gets added to the compost mix, because he doesn't want those things in his dirt.

Malibu Compost is the only non-GMO classified soil company in America. When getting their company certified, he had to threaten the CDFA with a lawsuit in order to write "non-GMO" on their bags of compost.

Randy was asked whether the chlorine in our water supply is bad for plants. He doesn't think so. With chlorine you may kill some of the bacteria, but bacteria is everywhere. However, if you're concerned about it, there's a filter called "Boogie Blue Plus," which works well.

For best results, Randy recommends applying ¼ - ½" of compost to both in-ground and potted plants. For trees, spread the compost in swathes all the way out to the dripline to add more biology into the soil. In containers, recharge the top layer by adding micro doses of natural fertilizers, organic kelp meal, and organic castings.

Top-dress everything with an organic amendment such as kelp, alfalfa, and worm castings. You can also use cover crops to add more nutrition into the soil. Vetch, clover, and rye all add nitrogen to the soil. They are also friendly to pollinators. Grow these between other crops, and chop and drop them in place when they're done.

Beneficial insects are another great addition to your garden biome. In the soil you can add different species of nematodes to hunt and kill larvae of fungus gnats, flies, grubs, and leaf miners. Above the ground, add ladybugs and lacewings. Before releasing ladybugs, water everything down so it's nice and moist, because the insects will be very thirsty. Also, only release ladybugs at dusk so they don't fly somewhere else.

Compost tea can be used as a drench or foliar feed. To make the tea, soak good compost, some fish kelp, worm castings, and so on in a 5-gallon bucket of water. Let it soak overnight and stir really well before applying. Randy



says compost tea is effective on rust and black spot if treated immediately.

Randy and Nora were asked

their opinion on bioreactors. (Bioreactors take biological waste and break it down to a point where you can use it in the garden.) Their opinion was again, "if the materials going into the reactor are clean then it's a good idea."

Our speakers were extremely gracious and had brought a huge stack of (Real Organic™) t-shirts which they handed out to everyone.

At the conclusion of the presentation, we had a small plant sale, followed by an amazing gardener's potluck.



There was a huge box of delicious black Monukka grapes and fresh tomatoes, dried jujubes, spanakopita, pasta and cabbage salads, fresh baked rosemary muffins, and of course plenty of desserts.

We thank Randy and Nora very much for their informative



presentation. Anyone interested their Real Organics products can find them at Green Thumb Nursery and Aqua-Flo Supply in Glendale, Canoga Park, and Ventura.

August 23 - Paradise Nursery Tour

We had some luck the day we toured Paradise. The weather was supposed to be scorching hot and sunny, but as it turned out the sky was overcast nearly the entire morning. There was even a little bit of rain. So in spite of the 100-plus degree weather, it was pleasant to walk around and explore the wonderful trees available.

Paradise Nursery in Chatsworth looks small from the outside. It's located just off the 118 freeway on De Soto, just south of Rinaldi. Look west for three tall palm trees with their trunks painted in colorful colors all the way up to the fronds at the top, and a miniature tractor with gaudy painted patterns half-covered by a vine beneath the trees.

The nursery has been family-owned and run for over 25 years. They specialize in Mediterranean climate fruit trees, such as citrus, stone fruit, persimmons, mulberries, and figs. They also have plenty of other fruiting and landscape plants for sale. Their website lists all the varieties they have for sale.

Per their website, Dr. Majid Jahanbin began the company after he and his family immigrated to the United States from Tehran. Dr. Jahanbin has a doctorate in Agricultural Science from the University of Bologna, Italy. He was also a long-time host of a gardening radio show, answering questions on air in Farsi.



His son Ash (Ashkan) holds degrees in Environmental Horticulture and Landscape Architecture from Cal Poly State University, San Luis Obispo. He is a former landscape contractor.

The family originally wanted to start a full garden center with everything for sale. But as time went on people kept asking for special fruit trees, or offering them special fruit trees to stock and sell, and eventually they became well known for their fruit trees. One of their favorites is "Anar Saveh," a pomegranate which they brought from Iran.

Pomegranates are native to Iran. In fact, there are over 600 varieties in Iran alone.

The family introduced some citrus to the California Clonal Program: a sour orange tree from Shiraz. Its fruit is mostly used for salads and fish and marmalade. It has a sour flavor, like a lemon. The original tree is in the ground and has been here for a long time. They use it for propagation. Because of the California quarantine (against Greening Disease) they must go through special testing to make sure it remains free of disease and pests, so they can continue to sell it.



They only sell citrus trees in Southern California, although they will deliver to Orange County and San Diego.

The nursery is constantly evolving. They obtained a large collection of fruit trees from wholesaler L.E. Cooke after Cooke closed down their nursery business. Next year they want to start growing on a different property and use this

location mostly for retail sales.

We were shown their original trees, such as the sour orange, a white mulberry, and a giant medlar tree, all growing in the ground. There is also a large citron tree grown from seed, which mutated into producing huge, oval

shaped fruit with very thick peels, perfect for marmalade.

They used to raise chickens at the back of the nursery, but it became too expensive when the chicken feed tripled in cost during the Covid pandemic in 2020 and they sadly had to get rid of them.

On our tour, we saw a huge collection of stone fruits and apple trees, lots of mulberries and persimmons, roses, many varieties of grapes, blueberries, jujubes, figs, walnuts, loquats, quinces, avocados, pomegranates, and a profusion of citrus trees including oranges, mandarins, kumquats, finger lemons, limes, and grapefruits. They have screened-in greenhouses for propagation and a huge greenhouse for trees which need more protection.



Medlar is an interesting fruit. You pick them after they start to rot.

After the tour, we gathered under shade cloth in a huge open patio and enjoyed a very fruit-oriented potluck. In addition to fresh dragonfruits, Persian figs, Flavor queen pluots, Santa Rosa plums, fresh sliced watermelon, dried apricots, Thompson and Black Monukka grapes, there was an amazing fig-walnut-cheese tart, a delectable apple-banana pie, and the nursery had hired an ice cream company which mixed batches of Shaved Ice Cream with any fruit we wanted. The rolled servings were beautiful as well as delicious!



We thank our hosts, the Jahanbins, for their gracious hospitality and hope we can have even more cooperative adventures together in the future!

The Haber-Bosch Process

By CRFG Member Eugene Dinovo, PhD, DABCC Director, Clinical Chemistry at the Department of Veterans Affairs (retired)

The Haber-Bosch process is an important industrial chemical reaction, used to synthesize ammonia (NH_3) from nitrogen and hydrogen gases.

Developed by Fritz Haber (1909) and scaled up by Carl Bosch (1913), this process revolutionized agriculture by enabling mass production of nitrogen fertilizers. Fritz Haber and Carl Bosch were independently awarded Nobel Peace Prizes in Chemistry for their work in discovering a chemical method of converting atmospheric nitrogen N_2 into usable form as ammonia NH_3 .

The process extracts nitrogen from the atmosphere. Hydrogen is derived from natural gas (methane). Fertilizers commonly use nitrogen (the "N" in NKP) as ammonium sulfate. Urea and ammonium nitrate are other nitrogen options for fertilizers. They are all derived from ammonia manufactured by the Haber-Bosch process.

A word about Nitrogen: www.croptonutrition.com/resource-library/the-facts-nitrogen-fertilizer. It's estimated that the Haber-Bosch process now supports about half the world's population by making modern agriculture possible.

The process has since become essential to agriculture, mining, industrial manufacturing, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals. It helps power and feed the eight billion people in our world today.

Here's a video link discussing the history of the Haber-Bosch process: <https://youtu.be/BZOjwh-HZgE>