



LOS ANGELES CHAPTER

2024 Volume XXIX Issue 2

GARDEN TOUR

Date: Saturday, May 25, 10:00 am

Location: Field trip to K.Gabrysch's home (Members only, please!)

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

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Meet Kelly Todd Gabrysch, the plant whisperer with a flair for the rare. Kelly isn't just into "gardening," he's on a mission to turn his green thumb into a forest of rare, quirky, and downright endangered botanical wonders. Exotic fruit trees, Hoya, orchids—you name it. If it's odd and leafy, Kelly's probably trying to coax it into bloom in his backyard.

He's not just a plant geek - he's a lover of social media as well. Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, TikTok—you name the platform, he's there, sharing his love for all things leafy and luscious.

Kelly's dream is to turn this passion for peculiar plants into his full-time gig. And honestly, in a world that's all too often black and white, we could all use a bit more of green, so come join us to see what he's growing.

MEETING - HUMONGOUS ANNUAL PLANT SALE!

Date: Saturday, June 22, 10:00 am

Location: Sepulveda Garden Center

Topic: (Pssst, wanna buy a rare plant?)

It's here at last! Our annual plant sale! Supported completely by YOUR (member) donations. Charles Portney will be donating many of his amazing, rare plants, and will describe everything for sale with his usual flair beforehand. As always, Charles strongly requests that you, too, donate non-quarantined plants from your collection. The meeting will conclude with a potluck lunch, so please also bring something to share.

Save the date!

CALENDAR FOR LA CHAPTER 2024

May 25	Field trip to Kelly Todd Gabrysch's home
June 22	Sepulveda Gardens - Annual Plant Sale
July 27	Field Trip to Dr. Mark Steele's home
August 24	Field Trip to Jose Ramirez' home ¹
September 28	To be announced
October 26	To be announced
November 23	To be announced
December 7	Holiday Party

¹ Additional information about Jose Ramirez:

<https://www.latimes.com/lifestyle/story/2022-08-18/planting-fruit-orchard-in-los-angeles-yard>

<https://spectrumnews1.com/ca/la-east/news/2019/08/10/artist-creates-work-inspired-by-his-urban-garden>

<https://gardenerd.com/blog/podcast-home-fruit-orcharding-with-jose-ramirez/>

<https://stonepierpress.org/goodfoodnews/rise-of-food-forests>

LOOKING BACK

By Deborah Oisboid

March 23 - Sylmar High Agricultural Center

Although it rained in the morning, our field trip to Sylmar High Agricultural Center had lovely, dry weather for our tour. This was our third annual Tony Stewart Memorial Symposium, named in honor of our late chapter Chairman.

We weren't the only people who visited the school in March. Earlier in the month, LAUSD Superintendent Alberto Carvalho toured the facilities and praised the program for its large community outreach. He said Sylmar Charter's regular donations of surplus fruits and vegetables help support LAUSD's Farm to School initiative, which aims to "provide fresh produce to students - within 24 to 48 hours of harvesting - to support child nutrition, increase student achievement and help improve the quality of life for our school communities."

<https://sanfernandosun.com/2024/03/06/agriculture-students-at-sylmar-charter-high-school-feed-themselves-and-others/>



About two dozen people attended, first enjoying a delectable potluck lunch, followed by a short presentation by our host Steve List, before we headed into the amazing growing grounds of the school. Each garden area has a theme. The first gardens we visited were just outside of the gate to the Agriculture classroom. On the side of the building is a beautiful memorial mural, with homages to Tony Stewart, Steve Goto, and John Mendoza (student). John Mendoza wrote a letter prior to graduating and said a mural "seems like the right way to improve a

community." He passed away the following year. Steve found the letter when they started the mural and dedicated it to him.

The mural depicts the history of Latino agriculture. Some of the imagery include the Circle of Life, the Seed of Life, The Mayan God of plants, and the Hummingbird.

The first garden we were introduced to was the herbal garden. They grow six different varieties of lavender. One of the school courses is a floral class where the students make bouquets using lavender and other flowers.

The adjacent garden is for pollinators. It includes plants such as African blue basil, lipstick salvia, lantana, and buddleia. There is also milkweed, both native and non-native. Some people object to growing non-native tropical milkweed, but if you chop it back when the native milkweed dies, then the Monarch butterflies will be encouraged to migrate, as they should.



Someone asked about tropical milkweed carrying a virus which affects Monarchs. Steve has not heard about a virus, and he has not seen any problems with the local butterflies eating their milkweed.

Steve loves white sage. It is a California native, and it grows wild in the hills. But some people go out and actually dig it up, killing it and preventing it from propagating in its natural habitat. If you buy white sage, be sure to check that it was "grown locally." If it doesn't say so, it might have been stolen from the hillsides!

We passed under nearly a dozen hummingbird feeders hanging just inside the gate to the Agriculture growing areas. These feeders must be cleaned and

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVVAi6Y9by0>

filled daily. If they aren't, the hummingbirds come and tell Steve there's a problem. (True story.)

They hope to put up a bat house soon. Bats are great for pollinating night-blooming flowers such as cacti.

Outside of the classroom is a huge cistern which collects rainwater from the roof. The greenhouses typically use only rainwater for about the first 3 months of the year. Steve admits rainwater might pick up minerals and dirt coming off of the roof. But as far as he's concerned the plants love it. He's never had a problem, and he sees three advantages to using rainwater: it has a neutral pH, it has tiny bit of nitrogen in it, and it is free.

Literally hanging from the side of a greenhouse are four city trash cans; one of each color. This is to teach the students how to use them for the right thing. Green equals green waste. Black equals trash. Blue equals recycling. Brown is for horse manure.



Next, Steve led us past the greenhouse to the composting area. Several large half-walled sections were partially filled with decaying plant material, in various stages of decomposition. For your soil to work best for your plants, it needs to be "alive." Living soil means it's compost, and compost has all the organisms within it. (Bagged soil is better but it's expensive. Compost takes a lot of work but is effectively free.)

They do some vermiculture (worm farming) at the school. LA Sanitation sells vermiculture kits for \$20. You want to use the red Wiggler worms for this.

Steve is a strong believer in organic pest control. He knows there is a big old rat which lives in the gardens, whom has nicknamed "Templeton," from "Charlotte's Web." When plants have bugs, he doesn't spray if he can help it. In November, he had a really bad white fly infestation, as well as scale and aphids. He put

Tanglefoot at the base of the trees. He washed the plants a lot to get rid of the ants, because the ants care for the aphids. Eventually beneficial insects came and took care of the ants, and everything came back into balance.

We went to the greenhouses. One building is called "The Plug Room" because it contains trays with scores of thimble-sized cups, each with a tiny seedling such as tomato, peppers, and herbs. The Plug Room is Stefan's area. Stefan is Steve's protégé and is taking classes to become a Master Gardener. He brings tons of ideas for the school.

Next to the Plug Room is the Shade area, with several tables covered in potted cyclamen and other plants. This is where the students transplant their seedlings and put them out under the shade cloth to harden off.

We came to an open, grassy area where there were several LARGE potted plants. There was a large circle of pots, each with a string leading to a central pole: Hyacinth beans were beginning to grow into a vine teepee. Steve's students had also just planted some tomatoes - in HUGE 40-gallon containers. Steve says



bigger is better because tomatoes need a really big root system. The containers are 2 feet wide x 2 feet deep x 2 feet tall, and the tomatoes will grow to 6 - 8 feet high in them. They use the lasagna method of planting. One layer of compost, one layer of fertilizer, one layer

of potting soil, then repeat with compost, fertilizer and so on up. All organic, of course!

On the other side of the walkway are plants grown and tended by the students. Currently, the majority are strawberries and rue. Rue is a very important herb in Latino culture. It is used to reduce anxiety and can sometimes cure earaches. And if you plant it in front of your house, Diablos (devils) won't enter.

Just past this, is a new tented area, full of acid-soil-loving plants. Right now, they have gardenias, azaleas,

and blueberries. (People growing blueberries in Southern California need low-chill varieties.)

When questioned about methods to acidify soil, Steve told us used coffee grounds will not turn soil acidic. He recommends just adding them to a compost pile. (Coffee grounds have a tiny bit of nitrogen.) Worms also love coffee grounds, if you do vermiculture.

Pine needles might make the soil acidic, but they take two years to break down so using them to change the soil pH is not usually worth the effort. Oak leaves take a long time too.

At this point our "tour guide" switched so Steve could take care of other things. His protégé, Stefan, guided us to the Orchard, where dozens of fruit trees are planted in the ground. Most of these were donated by Dave Wilson Nursery about 10 years ago: cherries, plums, pluots, apriums, and guava. There are also several fruits the kids have not tasted before: Asian pears, Surinam cherry (a pseudo-cherry native to Mexico), Barbados (acerola) cherry, and cherimoya.

Past the Orchard, we walked through a gigantic, open greenhouse full of potted plants: fruits, vegetables, flowers, and young trees. Most of these had been donated either by individuals or nurseries.



On the other side of the greenhouse were more mature fruit trees growing in the ground. Redbud (yes, many parts are edible!), persimmon, mulberries, jujube, and pomegranates. The pomegranates were recently pruned back drastically. Most of the branches were double grafted with new varieties. To prevent the bark from splitting, they used metal hose clamps. Then they sealed the cuts using Elmer's glue to fill the gaps, electrical tape and parafilm wax tape



on top to maintain humidity, and hose clamps around the whole thing. It looked a bit like Frankenstein!

The flowers of the Peppermint Peach tree were real show-stoppers- the trees were in full bloom.

We were told students sometimes get to plant trees around the school. The school has an apple orchard and tons of roses on the campus.

Near a 20-foot-tall light post are three huge pots growing hops vines. Yes, they teach the students how to make beer. They harvest and dry the hops, and



then learn the process to make it, although they don't actually brew alcohol. Hops add bitterness, and sugar is sweet. They first grew vines last year, but when they died back in winter, they split the roots into thirds and are now watching the vines grow up the pole. Someone suggested you can cook and eat young hops vines, like asparagus. The students haven't tried that (yet). Our own brewer member, Art Fitzsimmons, says there's such a thing as hops water which is not alcoholic. He says it's very refreshing.



The school's winter vegetable garden currently has ghost peppers, kale, collards, broccoli, cabbage, and celery. They're about finished for the season. The peppers had been originally planted the previous year

and they left them in the ground over winter to see if they would grow any fruit. (They haven't.)

After a thorough tour, Steve raffled off dozens of mature fruit trees, berry bushes, and other plants from the school's collection. Amazing varieties to choose from! We all felt so lucky. We can't thank Steve and Stefan enough for hosting us at their amazing, fabulous school, and for teaching us so much!

April 27 - Brokaw Nursery

On a lovely, sunny day we had a delightful visit to Brokaw Nursery, nestled in the foothills of Ventura.



About 60 years ago, Hank and Ellen Brokaw founded Brokaw Nursery. Hank was the nephew of Harold Brokaw - the man who originally popularized and propagated the Hass Avocado, which successfully replaced the Fuerte Avocado in popularity. With hard work and innovation, Hank and Ellen built the nursery into one of California's largest wholesale suppliers of avocados and subtropical orchard trees. They currently produce over 300,000 plants per year and export to several countries worldwide.

Hank's son, Rob Brokaw, is the current owner of the nursery. He continues to refine their growing techniques to produce stronger, healthier avocado trees. We met Rob briefly, but were led on the tour by the very capable Kamille Garcia-Brucher (Research and Development Manager) and Matias Purcell Ahrens (Director of Technology).

While our chapter members were still arriving, one of our members brought out an avocado which his neighbor had grown, hoping someone at the nursery could identify the variety. They discussed size, shape, color, and texture of the fruit. They also asked questions about the shape, scent, and taste of the leaves. The fruit was not as round as Reed, not as lumpy as Hass, and had a longer neck. The fruit stays on the tree until November. Although one specimen is not always easy to identify, the Brokaw people thought it might be a Sharwil.



When our visit officially began, Kamille showed us the nursery's unique and extremely effective preparation of double-grafted avocados. It all starts with the seed. They purchase extra-large avocado seeds from the Dominican Republic.



(Their growers call them "Criollo," but that could just be a generic name for a local avocado.) These larger-than-normal seeds contain tremendous growing potential. The seeds Kamille had in her display were the Zutano variety, which, while larger than Hass, are smaller than the "Criollos" they normally use. In terms of growth, bigger is

definitely better: a larger seed has more energy than a small seed.

Once the seeds sprout, a woodstock scion is grafted on top. The woodstocks are chosen for special growth characteristics, such as drought or disease tolerance, resistance to blight, survivability in excessive water, or other desirable attributes. They will become the true rootstock of the new tree. Leola and Dusa varieties are among their most commonly used woodstocks/rootstocks.

This first graft is kept mostly in the dark, where it grows tall and thin, and almost white from lack of chlorophyll. Once the woodstock is big enough, a second graft is made on top of it. This will be the eventual fruiting variety.

The woodstock is scratched, coated with rooting hormone and buried in special potting soil. When the top graft looks viable, a metal ring is placed at the joint between the original seed and woodstock. As the tree roots grow, the ring gets tighter, strangling the seed growth and eventually causing it to drop off. This leaves the woodstock as the sole root source of the tree.

Trees are grown in what they call the "sunshine mix," which is commercially purchased perlite and cocoa peat. It is similar to what you would find in a commercial garden center. They plant directly in "liners." Saplings in these liners are sold as their "small" size trees. The liners are plastic bags supported by a stiff plastic ring. Trees in the smaller liners cost less than those transplanted into 3-1/2-gallon field pots.

The grafted trees are kept in special buildings with environmental controls for temperature and humidity. (Warm and humid.)

The nursery receives new fruit varieties to try from all over the world. "Luna" is a relatively new avocado which is starting to get more attention. It was first discovered back in the 1990s. Increasing a fruit's popularity takes a long time! In addition to the popular edible fruit, they also

sell pollinizers. (Bacon avocado, although tasty, is sold as a pollinizer.) Between 3 - 12% of the trees in each nursery field are pollinizer varieties.

After the grafting presentation, we all piled into various vehicles and drove into the orchard. First stop: Cherimoyas!



At the field we visited, we learned about some of the varieties grown, such as "African Pride" atemoya. There was a single row of about 40 trees, all used for genetic material for propagation. The trees were about four years old and 8 - 10 feet tall, lush and healthy. They are fertilized with a 50/50 Nitrogen-potassium mix, which is perfect for new growth.

Home growers need to hand pollinate their cherimoyas to get fruit. Since the nursery just uses the trees for propagation, they don't hand pollinate. However, having multiple trees next to



each other means they pollinate naturally. Many trees had fruit on them. They do not harvest fruit very often; usually only a few times each year for either a tasting or to show off the varieties they offer.

Most of the young growth is harvested as scions for grafting. Since they want to maximize vegetative material, they don't prune for shape -

they prune for lots of growth and new twigs. Next to the cherimoya row was a field full of "Dusa" avocados grown for use as a rootstock. The trunks and leaves had been sprayed with a 50-50 mix of white paint/water to protect them from sunburn. They do NOT want their grafting materials to get sunburned!

Squirrel damage is a definite problem here. Their solution? They trap and do not release.

When they want fruit, they bring in bees. This year's beehives arrived about a month ago. While it would be nice to have their own hives, beekeeping takes a lot of work, and they don't need the extra workload!

Brokaw Nursery maintains a huge germplasm block which they call "The Library." This is a collection of commercial/public/proprietary avocado varieties. The Library is actually a grove of about 250 trees (two copies of each variety) growing on the hillside. It's a bit of a hike to enter this amazing forest of fruit. (And to be honest, a little exhausting because it's all uphill from the unpaved road.) But imagine standing on the slope, gazing at scores of mature avocado trees loaded with both fruit and flowers. What a great place to be on a clear sunny April afternoon!



(Guests who had difficulty walking were brought up in a Kubota tractor, which could handle the rougher terrain.)

Kamille handed out color coded spreadsheets

which they use to track the different varieties. Varieties are listed, along with the rootstock, in numbered rows and columns, so they can be found more easily in the grove. The trees are also clearly tagged with both variety and rootstock names.



The day of our visit, the avocado trees were so overloaded with flowers, you almost couldn't see the leaves unless you were standing next to a tree trunk. The nursery uses a high-density planting method where trees are planted relatively close together. This was extremely evident in The Library, where tree trunks were growing only couple of feet apart.



All of their groves are part of an irrigated land management group and utilize water conservation methods like drip irrigation. Portions of the property are maintained as conservation areas. The ocean keeps moisture in the air. They have no wells but share a reservoir with two other local ranches, so water must be carefully managed. Matt said it's like a puzzle every time you want to irrigate.

The Library's purpose is mostly to maintain the plant material, not so much for growing fruit to eat. However, the trees happily produce fruit anyway. When they do harvest, the nursery will put together a tray with many different varieties to show off the skins and shapes. There is no set time of year. "Harvest" happens



whenever it's convenient, usually once per year. Before our tour began, we were cautioned about rattlesnakes and poison oak. While they are not a problem in the lower fields, we should watch out for them uphill at the Library. Thankfully, we didn't encounter either threat that day.

Time for questions!

When should we prune avocado trees? Depending on the variety, the time between pruning to harvest is about 6 to 8 months. This is not the same as the interval between avocado bloom to fruit ripening. Again, depending on the variety, blossom to fruit harvest could take about 16 months. (Bill Brandt confirmed his Reed avocado is a 16-monther. It pollinates in April and ripens June the following year.)

How do they feed their trees? They use a 50/50 nitrogen potassium fertilizer which also has micronutrients. It can be added to drip irrigation. They don't do top fertilization.

Knowing tender growth can get sunburn, what do they do during heat waves? They don't usually get heat waves, it's very rare in Ventura, with the ocean nearby.

We had a terrific time visiting Brokaw Nursery and learned a lot about developing and growing

subtropical fruit trees for orchard and farm use. Quite a difference from home growing! We want to thank our hosts for a delightful day and hope we can visit them again soon!

CRFG-LA Classified Ads

OFFER from Bill Brandt: Hello fellow Apple and Pear growers. I'm offering a solution to the Apple Codling Moth, whose larvae are the proverbial worm in the apple or pear. The solution is Pheromone Loops which attract the male away from the female. Using these will nearly eliminate worms in your apples and pears. Simply place two loops over two twigs in each tree. No poisons, and no dead insects.

If interested, please contact the editor at editor@crfg-la.org for more information. This is a limited time offer, until all the Pheromone Loops are sold out.