



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

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A report of the 2003 Annual General Meeting in Siena, Italy

The 2003 Mediterranean Garden Society's Annual General Meeting was a rousing success this year. The accommodations at the Castello di Modanella near Siena in Tuscany were modern and ancient at the same time. Thank goodness for good heaters and huge fireplaces in the Castello during meals and the meeting. Due to cool and showery weather, many umbrellas were raised during the tour portions of the event.

Visits to the grand estates of Castello di Celsa and Villa Cetinale included formal gardens of box, cascading capers on walls, long oak arbors, a fragrant mint groundcover, fruit trees in orderly groups, and interesting stonework with figures and busts of long ago popes and creatures. Il Bosco della Ragnaia is a modern garden created by artist and philosopher Sheppard Craige that includes elements of formal spaces, modern art, and boschi (wooded areas). We toured Certosa di Pontignano, a monastery converted to a conference center by the University of Siena. Many trees in pots, an oak arbor and two stone dogs guarding from the rooftop were contained within the walls. A working property, Villa di Geggiano is managed by two brothers who inherited it with a huge kitchen garden, a cistern fed from the building rooftops, a hedged theater, a working vineyard and winery, and a villa that was last renovated in 1790. The home has painted ceilings and walls, decorations everywhere, and burlap tapestries and French fabrics on the walls. Lunch was catered here in the family room.

The last estate tour was La Foce, owned by the Origo family. We were led by the current owner through the lemon garden to the formal hedge lower garden and up the hill through the bosco. The lunch was served in the dining and family rooms of the beautiful house. The evening meals were delightful and the tours went very smoothly, thanks to Carol Smith, John Garner and the rest of the local MGS contingent. At the meeting, the next AGM location was announced - start planning your 2004 AGM trip to Corfu, Greece.

Bracey Tiede



a doorway at Villa Cetinale - photo by Bracey Tiede

As Bracey reports, the Annual General Meeting of the Society was upbeat and informative, and the activities that accompanied it were the kinds of things you experience once in a lifetime, and then only in extraordinary company.

19 Californians, from all three California branches attended. All established new friendships and gained new insights into the challenges the Society faces worldwide! Watch our journal, *The Mediterranean Garden*, for details about next year's meeting.

All members are invited to share ideas for speakers and activities with the Executive Committee. We are looking for places to meet for the occasional talk or other Society get-together in Marin, the Peninsula or the San Jose area that would be inexpensive, or better, free. And who among you would be willing to represent the Society at events held by other organizations around the Bay Area? There are lots of opportunities!

Nancy Swearingen

Upcoming Events Inside! →

The Pomegranate

A Fascinating Fruit

Native from northern India to the Levant, pomegranates, *Punica granatum*, have been in cultivation since prehistoric times and they are common around the shores of the Mediterranean. A deciduous shrub or small tree that may reach a height of 20 to 30 feet, the pomegranate is prized for its colorful flowers and fruits. Showy bell-like flowers are crimson or white in color and bloom in summer, followed by autumn fruit. Branches are often thorny and produce narrow green leaves with bronze new growth that turns yellow in the fall.

The fruit is the size of an apple with a hard rind that is bright red when ripe. The calyx lobes of the fruit resemble a crown, and they were the inspiration for Solomon's crown as well as for all crowns since that time. The pomegranate produces a sweet juice that highly valued in its native lands for making refreshing drinks and a spiced wine. The seeds are also eaten, sprinkled with sugar, or dried as a confectionery. The fruits dry to a deep burgundy color, and may be used in floral arrangements.

Since ancient times the pomegranate was regarded as a sacred plant and a symbol of fertility because of its large number of seeds. The fruit is found in Egyptian inscriptions and sculpture. According to legend, the pomegranate was the 'tree of life' in the garden of Eden. In the temple of Solomon, the pomegranate decorated pilasters and priestly robes, and it became the symbol of eternal life in early Christian art.

To the Greeks and Romans the pomegranate was a symbol of regeneration as told in the myth of Proserpine who spent half the year with Hades in the underworld when the earth was cold and barren and the other six months above ground with her mother Ceres when the earth was fruitful and warm. The pomegranate represented all seeds that must be placed underground to germinate before emerging into the light to grow for a season, then returning to the darkness beneath the earth.

The Moors brought to Spain the method of tanning leather with pomegranate rinds, and Cordoba became famous for its leather. Granada signifies 'pomegranate' in Spanish, and when the Catholic Kings conquered Granada from the Moors in 1492 they took the pomegranate as a symbol of a united Spain. Lovely old pomegranate trees still grace the courtyards of the Alhambra.

Brides in Turkey cast a pomegranate to the ground, and the number of seeds that fell out indicated the number of children they would have. In China the pomegranate also represented fertility, and the fruit was used to decorate temples and porcelains. A pomegranate motif may be seen on a pavilion in the new Chinese garden in Portland, Oregon.

An understanding of their value to cultures worldwide deepens our appreciation of pomegranates. They have many uses as landscape plants and thrive in many types of soil including alkaline. Pomegranates prefer full sun or part shade, and monthly irrigation is required to produce fruit. Dwarf selections that are ideal for containers, and taller forms make good foundation plants or hedges. Pomegranates may also be grown as attractive single or multi-trunk trees (see the cultivar list on page 3).

Katherine Greenberg



Decorative uses of Pomegranates:

Small sized pomegranates dry easily, and can be used in permanent arrangements of fruits, nuts and cones, or in Christmas wreaths and greenery bowers.

Recipes:

🌀 Pomegranate-infused vodka

1 bottle (750 ml) vodka 4 whole cloves
Seeds from 2 pomegranates 1 cinnamon stick

Combine all ingredients in a large glass jar. Cover and store in a closet, basement or wine cellar for 5-14 days. Strain into a clean 750 ml glass bottle. Chill well.

Serve straight up in chilled martini or aperitif glasses.
Makes 750 ml. (S.F.Chronicle Food Section)

🌀 Pomegranate Lamb

1 C unsweetened pomegranate juice 1 ts black pepper
1/2 C dry red wine 1 T chopped fresh basil leaves
2 large onions 1 t salt
1 lemon; unpeeled, chopped 1 (5- to 6-lb) leg of lamb,
3 cloves garlic butterflied

In a blender, combine pomegranate juice, red wine, onions, lemon, garlic, pepper, basil and salt. Rub some of marinade well into lamb. Place meat in shallow glass or enamel pan. Pour remaining marinade over meat. Marinate in refrigerator overnight. When ready to cook, wipe off excess marinade. Grill over medium coals or roast the lamb at 325F until thermometer reaches 145F for medium-rare. Let rest 5 to 10 minutes before carving.

🌀 Autumn Salad

6 C Romaine lettuce, torn into bite-sized pieces
1 head of fennel, washed and sliced crosswise into 1/4 inch slices
2 Navel oranges, sectioned
1/2 C dried currants
seeds of 1 pomegranate
1/2 C Trader Joe's Asian salad dressing

Combine first four ingredients in a large salad bowl. Add dressing, and toss. Sprinkle with pomegranate seeds, and serve. Serves 6

Calendar of Events

January thru March

California Native Wildflowers – an exhibit of watercolor paintings and sketching notes by Linda Stewart, daily except major holidays, 10 am to 4 pm, Helen Crocker Russell Library, Strybing Arboretum & Botanical Gardens, (415) 661-1316 x303.

January 17th (Saturday), Pleasant Hill

California Rare Fruit Growers Scion Exchange – share and/or obtain scion cuttings and seeds of rare or unusual fruits/vegetables, and talk with those who share this interest; noon-3pm, \$2 donation; 1700 Oak Park Blvd, Pleasant Hill, sponsored by Golden Gate Chapter, California Rare Fruit Growers. For more info call (510) 843-1657, or visit www.crfg.org/golden_gate/ (other Chapters of the CRFG will be hosting scion exchanges during this month – check the www.crfg.org website for more info).

January 27th (Tuesday), 1:00pm, Oakland

Our Mediterranean Climate: what does it mean and why should we care? – a slide presentation by Seán O'Hara, outlining the unique climate we enjoy in the Bay Area, its challenges and advantages, and its impact upon our lifestyle as well as our gardening style; Hillside Gardeners of Montclair, Joaquin Miller Community Center, 3594 Sanborn Drive (inside Joaquin Miller Park), Oakland. For more information, contact the Program Coordinator Ronni Brega, (510) 482-5884, rlbrega@pacbell.net.

February 29th (Sunday), 1:30pm, Berkeley *

Sensational Salvias, with Betsy Clebsh –
(see information at right)

March 27th (Saturday), Marin County *

Early Spring Plant Walk –
(see information at right)

* MGS sponsored event

Selected pomegranate cultivars:

- 'Ambrosia' – fruiting variety with very large fruit!
- 'California Sunset' ('Legrellei') – 8-10ft tall, ornamental double coral flowers edged white.
- 'Granada' – fruiting variety with deep colored, sweeter fruit.
- 'Orange Master' – dwarf ornamental with bright orange flowers and an occasional small fruit.
- 'Nana' and 'Chico' – dwarf ornamental selections.
- 'Toyosho' – 6-8ft tall with light apricot colored flowers and edible orange-red fruit.
- 'Wonderful' – good fruiting variety with tart fruit that is best in hot climates.

Various other flower forms and fruit types (there is a purple fruited form) can occasionally be found.

If fruiting pomegranates are hard for you to find locally, you might try this mail order resource:

Bay Laurel Garden Center

2500 El Camino Rea, Atascadero, CA 93422

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

- has an enormous selection of fruit trees.

Seán O'Hara

Sensational Salvias

for the mediterranean garden

with **Betsy Clebsh**

Sunday, February 29, 1:30 p.m.

Univ. of Calif. Botanical Garden, Berkeley

MGS Northern California Advisory Committee Member and Salvia Expert Betsy Clebsh, author of *A Book of Salvias*, has agreed to tell us about the new salvias she has included in the second edition of her book. We all probably were caught up in the salvia mania of a few years ago, when Betsy's book first came out. The hysteria seems to have abated, but not, we hope, to the extent that you have all ripped out your salvias in favor of something new. There is a salvia for every situation in the garden, and there are some that are new and wonderful. Here's your chance to update your knowledge, and get expert advice!

As always, our meetings are free, and admission to the UC Botanical Garden for MGS members will be free, but we hope you'll donate a modest \$5. to help us cover our costs. There will be a plant raffle, and the latest edition of Betsy's book will be available for purchase and to be signed by the author. And late winter, as you know, is a sublime time at the UCBG. BE there! For more information, call Nancy Swearengen at 510-547-2548.



Mount Tamalpais from San Rafael, oil on canvas, by Gilbert Munger, 1870

Early Spring Plant Walk

Saturday, March 27, 10a.m.

Mount Tamalpais, Marin County

Becoming a tradition is our early spring wildflower walk guided by botanist, author/teacher, **Glenn Keator**. Last spring's walk at Mt. Diablo was such fun that we decided we had to do it again. This year, we'll journey to Mt. Tamalpais. Bring your lunch, wear your walking shoes and prepare to learn more about our native mediterranean flora, and perhaps be tested on things we learned last year!

Cost \$10 per person for members. Send your check, payable to the MGS, to SueAnn Manners, 63 Davis Rd, Orinda, 94563, or for more info call her at 925-254-0226.

Winter is not a time of dormancy in mediterranean climates!

Common wisdom tends to try and convince us that winter is the period during the year when plants are dormant, sleeping under a blanket of snow. Even those who have recently transplanted themselves here from colder climates are likely to say to the rest of us, "Cold? This isn't cold! Now back in Minnesota where I'm from" These same people often fail to consider that our mild, wet winters are a perfect time for plants to grow, and many plants have indeed adapted to this climate pattern. Consequently, the mild mediterranean winter is a time of growth – even trees and plants that appear dormant can be putting out important root growth, preparing for spring. Most mediterranean adapted species grow only over the rainy season!

This winter, take stock of your garden to see if there is enough 'interest' during the season. Many plants put on great floral displays during January & February – here are just a few you might wish to consider planting now or in next fall's planting season: *Abelia*, *Acacia*, *Aloe*, *Antirrhinum* (Snapdragons), *Arbutus* (flowers & berries), *Arctotis*, *Asteriscus*, *Bergenia*, *Calendula*, *Camellia*, *Chaenomeles* (Flowering Quince), *Chasmanthe*, *Citrus*, *Clivia*, *Dimorphotheca* (annual African Daisy), *Hardenbergia*, *Helleborus* (Christmas Rose), *Heteromeles arbutifolia* (Christmas berry), *Ipheion*, *Iris unquicularis*, *Manzanita*, *Matthiola* (Stock), *Osteospermum*, *Pericallis* (Cineraria), *Roldana* (formerly *Senecio*) *petasitis* (Velvet Groundsel), *Rosmarinus* (Rosemary), *Sarcococca* (richly fragrant!), *Satureja montana* (Winter Savory), *Sparmannia* (African Linden), *Strelitzia* (Bird of Paradise), *Viola* (Pansies, Violets, Violas).

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



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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 ~~\$35~~

Life membership is ~~\$350~~

Send your personal check or credit card information to:

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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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Don't Forget to Renew Your Membership for 2004!