

ACONA Meeting Notes, September 29, 2015

(NOTE: The PowerPoint slides contain a great deal of detail not captured in these notes. Please refer to the PowerPoint for more information.)

Following introductions, the following topics were covered:

Rachael Maysels, Food Forward (foodforward.org) Backyard Harvest Program

Food Forward rescues fruit that would otherwise go to waste and donates it to hunger relief agencies. Gleans produce from farmers markets -- 16 million pounds this year.

It's okay to water your fruit trees during the drought. They have many beneficial properties (see slides).

Signs of drought are also signs of overwatering, so it's important to monitor how much water your trees are getting. Good investment: moisture meter, which measures moisture to a depth of 12-18". Morning is the best time to water, before the heat of the day.

Watering devices: bubbler, drip irrigation, soaker hose, in order of rate of flow. (The slower the better.)

Shovel test: dig 1ft. hole, fill with water, walk away for four hours. Do it again. If either time your hole still contains water, the tree doesn't have enough drainage.

Water slowly, deeply, infrequently.

Most important: apply mulch. Start at least 6" from trunk. See slides for benefits.

Prune trees for healthy fruit production. Remove suckers (small sprouts from the base of the tree) and spouts (vertical sprouts growing out of bigger branches).

Slides have suggestions for climate appropriate fruit trees.

Rachel Surls, University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources Master Gardener Program

Master Gardener Program trains volunteers and they work with the neighborhood. Training via a 12-week program, March-May. Recertification every year. Provide technical assistance for community, school, other community-based garden projects. Appear at fairs and farmers markets to give info, answer questions. Have a master gardener help line for any gardening questions. (626-586-1988; mglosangeleshelpline@ucdavis.edu)

Program costs \$250 (scholarships are available). Classes are on Saturdays. They usually get a couple of hundred applications for 50 spots. Prefer people with gardening experience who like to volunteer.

Grow LA Victory Garden Classes teach basics of vegetable gardening. 4-wk class offered at 10-15 sites in spring and fall. It's offered at the Altadena Community Garden.

Tips (see slides for more)

Prioritize water use: mature fruit trees and landscape trees

Recognize early signs of drought and address them right away (see slides)

One or two deep irrigations several weeks apart in the spring and early summer

Check out nurseries and places like the Arboretum to look for drought resistant plants you may like.

Q&A

Non-GMO seeds: GMO seeds are only available to commercial farmers. The seeds available at local nurseries are not GMO. Certified organic seed producers have their seeds tested.

Drought tolerant edible plants: Rosemary, sage, arugula in the winter, many herbs. (See slides for examples.) Miner's lettuce, Cleveland sage, Rogers red grapes, honey mesquite, purslane. Sunset Western Garden Book is a good resource.

Fracking water used for citrus crops: No, it's not happening. Water that has been reclaimed and purified from oil drilling sites is being used in a couple of locations in Kern County, but the water is tested.

How to get more fruit trees planted: speak at public meetings, mount a petition. Example: Fallen Fruit.

Food Forward

Have liability insurance. Volunteers sign a release waiver to protect the tree owners.

Pick 15-20 feet, use ladders and professional fruit pickers. All fruit is preallocated to recipients (e.g., food pantries), as local as possible. Will leave fruit on the tree for the owner but will not pick it for them. Food Forward will take extra garden produce in bulk. Small donations get referred to local food pantries.