

## DECEMBER PROGRAM & HOLIDAY EVENT RECAP • GARDEN SHARE

On December 14, the SCHS closed out the year with our annual holiday gathering, featuring guest speaker Eric Focht of UC Riverside who presented “Avocados: Their Natural History and How to Grow Them in Southern California”. He is a doctoral candidate at UCR and has been working there since 1999 in avocado research and breeding. Focht’s presentation combined a historical time line of the avocado’s cultivation, with scientific analysis of the fruit’s properties that impact successful production.

Currently the U.S. is the world’s greatest consumer of avocados, with Haas accounting for more than 95% of total sales, and 85% of all fruits sold coming from Mexico. Depending on which varieties are grown, and where, avocados can be “in season” all year. Globally, avocados are predominantly grown from seedlings, while in California the majority of new trees are planted on clonal rootstock.

Historical documentation indicates that avocados have been a food crop throughout Central and South America since about 1200 BC, with references to selective cultivation by the Mayans dating to 500 AD. By the 1500s the Aztecs had categorized avocados into the three dominant classifications still in use today:

the Mexican, the Guatemalan and the lowland tropical, each having distinguishing characteristics in terms of appearance, size and flavor. Humans moved these from one location to another for millennia, and in modern times cross-breeding, grafting and other propagation methods resulted in varieties currently being grown.

Early California breeders focused on three sub-species of the *Persea americana* (which hybridized freely) with their main focus being on climate-related traits that would make them suitable for successful cultivation. Before 1905 fruits were propagated from seed, at which time C.P. Taft began grafting them in the city of Orange, paving the way for growers to source genetic material from a greater range of locations. Many varieties resulted, but the most popular and enduring – Haas and Fuerte – dominate the global market today.

Focht indicated that yield quantity and quality, pollination, structural pruning of trees, harvesting schedules, climate, pest and disease resistance, plus fertilization are all important aspects for successful cultivation, both commercially and for home orchards. These factors and others are what he and his colleagues in the UCR avocado breeding program must consider when selecting new varieties that could be viable for mass-marketing. The research that has been ongoing there since the 1960s has led to a number of avocado introductions, including the Lamb Haas, Sir Prize, and GEM,

as well as the recent Luna UCR, which will be available to the public in the next few years. You can learn more about current and future projects by linking to this recent UCR article, or by reviewing Focht’s presentation in SCHS’s video archives (link below). It’s a really fascinating subject!

🌀 Sabine Steinmetz

[Link here to watch the entire program on YouTube:](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZvjsWle4MQ)

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### SCHS MONTHLY GARDEN SHARE

*Let’s make plans & resolutions for the new gardening year and:*

- Finish winter rose tasks: hard pruning, transplanting or planting new bare root varieties by the end of the month.
- Cut back deciduous fruit trees, taking care to retain fruiting wood (varies by species).
- Prune back grape vines and cane berries while they’re leafless.
- Keep your seedlings watered in between forecasted rain days.
- Do general clean up chores, but keep some leaf litter as insulating mulch around your shrubs.

*Cheers to glorious gardens in 2024!*

🌀 Sabine Steinmetz

Photo courtesy of speaker.



## HOLIDAY FESTIVITIES & SEASONAL GRATITUDE

In addition to featuring a seasonal program, our December meeting typically doubles as a holiday party, with potluck treats provided by members, plants for sale and our popular giveaway table filled with members’ donations.

We wanted to give a shout out to all who contributed food this year as we had a scrumptious assortment on offer! There were warm quiches, hand-made Filipino lumpia, hummus, veggies and a huge fruit bowl, plus an assortment of sweets including Italian wedding cookies, Mexican pastries and brownie bites topped with tasty avocado cream, as well as many more delicacies to appeal to every palate.

And special thanks go to Aprille Curtis for providing table bouquets with cuttings from her home garden. They featured *Pyrostegia venusta*, *Gomphrena decumbens*, *Tulbaghia fragrans*, and *Eucalyptus lunata* for a seasonal pop of color that everyone was admiring and which set a cheerful tone for our party.



Photo by: Jill Vig

*We’re grateful to everyone who was able to attend – your presence made for a most festive evening!* 🌀

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