

A LIVING FEAST FOR ALL SENSES

SAMPLE THE CULINARY BOUNTY OF NATIVE PLANTS
AT CALIFORNIA BOTANIC GARDEN'S VIRTUAL EVENTS.

BY JEANETTE MARANTOS

THE PANDEMIC hasn't stopped California Botanic Garden from celebrating its uniquely California flavor — literally.

For nearly 100 years, the state's largest garden of California native plants has been the place to see how the dowdy seedlings sold at nurseries grow to become beautiful, diverse and aromatic in your yard.

Lately, it has been showcasing how to bring those plants to your dining table.

"We think these gardens are an amazing platform to inspire people to bring California native plants into their gardens, their kitchens and beyond," said David Bryant, director of visitor experience.

The public garden, formerly known as Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden, sprawls across 86 acres near the Claremont Colleges with more than 1,200 native species, including redwoods and manzanitas, buckwheats, Joshua trees and about a jillion different sages, many of which are blooming now.

Need another reason to visit? How about three: Coyote Mint Chip ice cream, Coastal Sage Yum ice cream and Cactus Cream ice cream, all made using native plants found at the garden. That trio of sweet treats is part of an upcoming virtual tasting and fundraiser for the garden,

which like many public spaces finds itself struggling to regain its footing (and funding) in the midst of the pandemic.

The garden was scheduled to celebrate its new name with some big events at the end of March. Then, the novel coronavirus struck and those plans were put on indefinite hold.

But inspiration blossomed.

The last two years the garden hosted an event called Brew Wild, inviting

SoCal breweries to create beers that incorporated native plants.

There can't be any crowds sampling beer this year but, inspired by the success of Brew Wild, the staff dreamed up creative virtual events, such as Taste Wild, which provided samples of baked goods infused with native plants to 300 participants to pick up and eat at home for a virtual group tasting. (You can watch it on YouTube.)

The garden also has

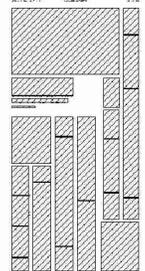
hosted Arrange Wild, providing 40 participants with native blooms and drawing them together for a flower-arranging lesson online (also available on YouTube).

On July 30, participants will have another chance to sample native plant cuisine with Freeze Wild: It involves taste-tasting those three native-plant-infused ice creams, created by Claremont's beloved Bert & Rocky's Cream Co.

Bryant developed and tested the recipes for

Coyote Mint Chip, Coastal Sage Yum and Cactus Cream at his home.

"These are the ones that are proven" delicious, he said. "But for every proven recipe I've had two to three failures. I tried Coyote Sagebrush ice cream once, and it tasted like turpentine. But I really love this. When I'm old and gray, I want to open a native-plant ice cream shop, to incorporate my two most favorite things in the world."



The Freeze Wild event will be limited to 300 people to ensure the event doesn't overuse the garden's native plants. "Our ambition is to model sustainable use of our native plants," Bryant said, and encourage people to create their own garden of native plants so they can make these recipes at home.

For \$65 (\$55 for members), participants get three pints of ice cream (one of each flavor) and an invitation to participate in the Zoom taste-testing and discussion about the recipes and how the plants fit into the environment. People who pay \$85 will get a VIP box with an ice cream scoop and cones.

Proceeds support the garden, which was started in 1927 by a pre-scientist rancher named Susanna Bixby Bryant (no relation to David, who calls himself a "Texas" Bryant).

Susanna Bryant was worried about the way development was affecting native plants and habitats, so she set aside 200 acres of her Santa Ana Canyon ranch near Yorba Linda in Orange County for a native plant garden in memory of her father, John Bixby.

The gardens opened to the public in 1929 under a managing board and advice from many notable botanists of the day (including famed native plant conservationist Theodore Payne). When Susanna died unexpectedly of a stroke in 1946, the garden's botanist, Philip Munz, a professor at the Claremont Colleges, became director.

Munz and the trustees decided to move the gardens from the ranch to a site less remote and near a college, where it could be useful for re-

search. The board purchased 54 acres near the Claremont Colleges and entered into a deal with Pomona College for perpetual use of 30-plus acres of college land for classes and research. The garden moved to its present site in 1951.

The Rancho Santa Ana name remained until recently, when the present board realized the garden needed a name that was easier to remember and better reflected its focus on native plants, David Bryant said. "We realized even people in Claremont didn't know who we are."

The college-research partnership is strong, with the largest seed bank dedicated to California native plants, conservation work to restore some 5,000 acres taken over by invasive species and more than 100 PhD and master's students graduated from the botany program.

BEAUTIFUL AND ... DELICIOUS?

> One of the garden's most important goals, however, is to get people excited about growing native plants and incorporating them into their daily lives. And for this, Bryant is the perfect booster.

"People think that native foods are a novel experience, but these flavors are really delicious and exciting," he said.

He points out black sage, for instance, and immediately waxes rhapsodic about its vanilla scent and the way its leaves enhance vanilla flavor. He uses food writer Melissa Clark's famed ice cream recipe and wraps 20 or so black sage leaves in cheesecloth to steep in the egg-cream-sugar mixture overnight

before removing the leaves and freezing the ice cream.

"It's light and just wonderfully aromatic, without tasting like bath and body products," he said. "For any dense, heavy meal like Thanksgiving, it's the best dessert you can do."

Want a more savory experience? Pluck a couple of California bay laurel leaves and stir those into a pasta dish for a few minutes before serving, then remove. The flavor is pungent and delicious, he said, but don't overdo it. "I've ruined more than one pasta dish by using too much," he said. "We actually planted a California native laurel in the backyard because we love the flavor so much."

Hummingbird sage, with its magenta flower spikes, and the delightful woolly bluecurls both make delicious iced tea. Fill a quart-size Mason jar at least half full of leaves, add boiling water and let it steep overnight. "The flowers are so beautiful, if you serve the tea in a glass dispenser, you can leave the flowers in the tea and it looks great," Bryant said.

Manzanita flowers make a lovely, deep magenta jelly, he said, no matter which variety you use. "I haven't found a bad manzanita flower yet," he said, "but in my experience, the more pink-tinged are the most delicious." Take about three cups of flowers, cover with a cup and a half of water and boil. The whitish flowers will turn magenta as they break down. Then use the recipe on the back of a pectin package to create the jelly from the flower "juice."

After a few months of closure, California Bota-

nic Garden opened with truncated hours. Members can enter for free without reservations, but nonmembers must purchase tickets online and reserve an entrance time to help maintain social distancing. Masks are required for visitors, and no tickets are sold at the entrance.

Finally, if you see plants you like, take a photo and jot down the name. The garden's plant store is closed during the summer but will reopen in October, which is the best time for planting California native plants.

California Botanic Garden

Where: 1500 N. College Ave., Claremont

Hours: 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 3 to 8 p.m. Wednesdays through Sundays
Admission: Tickets must be purchased online. \$10 for adults, \$6 for seniors and students, \$4 for children ages 3-12. Members and children under 3 enter free.

Info: calbg.org

Bonus: Go to latimes.com/lifestyle for a recipe for sage shortbread, courtesy of California Botanic Garden.



Lupine



Hybrid
monkey
hand tree



Fuchsia
flowered
gooseberry

CALVIN B. ALAGOT Los Angeles Times

Potential cure for ailing citrus trees is a dose of hope for industry

Attention home gardeners: Our beloved citrus trees may yet be saved from the incurable huanglongbing, a.k.a. HLB or citrus greening disease, thanks to natural immunities found in a rare and flavorful relative known as the Austral-

ian finger lime.

After five years of study, a team of UC Riverside researchers led by Hailing Jin, professor of plant genetics, identified which gene in the finger lime causes that immunity and extracted it to create an antibiotic that has killed the disease in young trees raised in laboratories and controlled environment greenhouses.

The treatment can be used as a spray or an injection, but don't go rushing to your garden store just yet.

In a news release, UC Riverside announced it has entered into an "exclusive, worldwide license agreement" with Boston-based Invaio Sciences to produce and market the antibiotic, but Jin said pro-

duction can't begin until the antimicrobial peptide (a really small protein) that kills the bacteria has gotten government approval.

That natural resistance is what prompted Jin to study the finger lime, and related plants, to see if she could determine why it seemed immune to HLB infections. She used comparative analysis to look at the plant's genes to see if she could identify what created the "internal immune response that protected it from infection ... and that allowed me to identify the responsive genes that contribute to these tolerances."

Australian finger limes are also known as caviar limes because once cut, the small, pickle-size fruit

spills into tiny caviar-like beads that provide an intense citrus taste.

Now that researchers have identified the peptide, Jin is hopeful the regulatory approvals will come quickly, since the protein is derived from a natural substance and appears safe to humans. Moreover, she said, the antibiotic is easy to manufacture and works in heat up to 130 degrees.

But Jin is adamant the treatment should not be called a cure, at least not until she's completed her tests on mature trees in the field, growing outside of a controlled environment. Those tests have been delayed because of coronavirus shutdowns.

The Jin peptide is the most promising development in de-

stroying the disease that has devastated Florida's citrus industry. The disease ruins the citrus fruit, so it stays bitter and green, and over time will kill the tree.

The disease is spread by the Asian citrus psyllid, a tiny sap-sucking insect discovered in California around 2008.

And California's \$1.7-billion citrus industry is willing to do whatever it takes to destroy the disease-spreading psyllid, such as the controversial practice of spraying the trees with pyrethroid and neonicotinoid pesticides, which are toxic to bees.

In California, untended residential citrus trees are one of the biggest threats, according to UC Riverside entomologist Elizabeth Grafton-Cardwell. About 60% of California's homes have at least one citrus tree, and the industry has been trying to keep people from planting more to contain the threat to commercial growers.

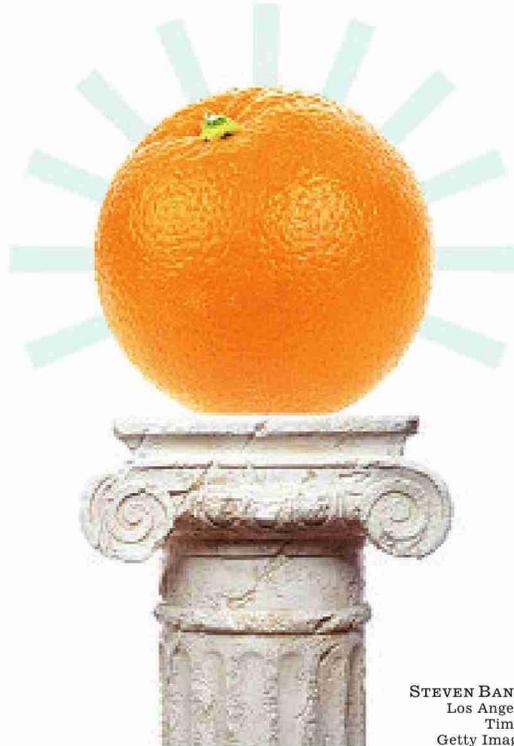
The University of California's department of agriculture and natural resources has created an interactive map at igis.ucanr.edu that identifies hot zones of infection. In Southern California they're mostly where Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties meet. Enter your address to see how close your home is to those infection areas.

If you have an infected tree, Jin said the best approach is to remove it because her

antibiotic won't be available soon.

"If you leave a positive tree anywhere, it can serve as a reservoir for psyllid to spread the disease," she said. "These psyllid can fly pretty far, miles away from an infected tree."

— JEANETTE
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STEVEN BANKS
Los Angeles
Times;
Getty Images