

Take Back the Valley – With Orchards

SAD FACT-the Santa Clara Valley of Northern California is now dubbed the prosaic “Silicon Valley,” but formerly its epithet was the more poetic “Valley of the Heart's Delight.” As such, it was the leading fruit producing region IN THE WORLD from the mid 1800s till the 1960s.

It was the prune, plum, apricot, cherry capitol of the world. Over the last 40–50 years the number of chill hours the valley receives has decreased by 2/3 – from 1200 to 400 hours – chill hours being the cumulative number of hours with temps between 32-45 degrees F. The term and numbers indicate the amount of cold chill required once a fruit tree has gone dormant, to enforce a period of rest and then to break dormancy and resume growth in the spring.

This radical reduction of chill hours now makes it virtually impossible to grow the varieties of fruit that formerly graced the valley landscape. This change was not brought about by climate change or global warming, but rather by an effect referred to as urban heat islands. It is caused by the heat absorbed and retained by the asphalt, cement, the building materials and the geometry itself of tall structures and roads, and the heat generated by vehicles and industrialization. Previously, the open ground of the fields and the orchards re-radiated daily heat absorption back into the "night sky," significantly cooling the air on the valley floor. Lamentably, this is the pattern we now choose to have on the land.

A few lines from a song by Keith Greeninger (local folk musician—think Jackson Brown with snarl and attitude) called *Rosie and Ruby* (his two grandmothers from "back in the day" and "over the hill" in Santa Clara) may serve as persuasive rhetoric with a poetic twist –

"There's a northern valley in California
where the times are changin' a little too fast.
and all these highways and buildings
ain't no kinda substitute
for the orchards and the fields.
Silicon chips ain't like trees of fruit,
they don't bloom in the spring
and bring their fruit into the fall.
all this kinda progress ain't no substitute....
beneath the concrete and the buildings
lies some of the most fertile soil in the world...."

A sort of "long term mulch" of a perverse nature.

I mention this because it's sad, really. And as Wendell Berry says, "what we do to the soil, we do to ourselves." But also, recently apprentice program grad Matthew Sutton (class of 2003, and a second-year apprentice in the Chadwick garden in 2004) was contracted to plant 600 apple trees in the "courtyard" of the new Apple

Inc. headquarters being built in Cupertino. I was kidding him when I said 1) apples for Apple, eh?, and 2) yeah, it's part of a new grassroots movement (occupy and take back the Valley – one small piece of ground at a time).

But then I got to thinking (always a dangerous proposition and generally frowned upon by higher ups), why not start in Los Gatos and work our way up the mid Peninsula to Palo Alto, knocking on the corporate front doors of Netflix, H.P., Agilent, Intel, Facebook, Google, Amazon, Cisco, Oracle, the Stanford Research Park and the like and propose/respectfully demand that they too plough down their lawns and start orchards. Organic orchards with a community educational focus and a fruit share to those in need. You know, "from each according to their means, to each according to their needs."

Yeah, "take back the Valley" with fruit trees again, this time with lower chill varieties. This will perhaps necessitate further changes in the landscape to swing the pendulum back in the direction of real life vs. virtual reality; seeking a new equilibrium, a change featuring less dry, impermeable landscapes and a return to a landscape that was once moist and permeable. One that while it pays tribute to the startling progressive gains of high tech and venture capitalism, still remembers and values (and in fact benefits from) a community and culture rooted in the soil — terre primum!!, terre primum!!, earth first!!, earth first!! in a gentle manner of course — orchards.

- Orin Martin, Chadwick Garden Manager