

## Highlights From Our 2011 Santa Fe Summer Conference

### Group photo at the HGSA flower trials:



The beautifully landscaped Santa Fe style campus of our conference hotel, the La Posada resort, certainly made us all feel both privileged and relaxed upon arrival. Our opening Evening Reception on Wednesday evening meant seeing old friends and meeting new ones as we sampled the local beers and wines of the region.

### La Posada conference hotel:



Thursday began with our annual Membership Meeting reviewing all our HGSA 2011 activities and plans. Next was an update on NGB activities by Diane Blazek, followed by two interesting round tables whose topics were suggested by members at our last conference. First, Patty Buskirk explained the organic certification process and answered many good questions about the business aspects of sourcing and selling organic seed packets. Our second presentation by Dr. Christopher Cramer, expert onion breeder at New Mexico State University, covered breeding basics for everyone in sales and marketing that do not have a horticultural background. This

roundtable helped explain how new seed varieties are developed and produced, seed stock is maintained and new introductions marketed. Our lunch, served outdoors on the patio, featured perfect late summer sunshine and a delicious sampling of Southwestern cuisine with the chef using many vegetables grown in our own HGSA trials.

#### **Thursday morning roundtables:**



The afternoon program focused on the connection between growing and cooking and eating. A highlight was the first presentation by Santa Fe Cooking with Kids, a remarkable nonprofit organization that teaches kids about healthy eating by letting them experience the whole process of making a delicious meal by learning how to cook with fresh ingredients themselves. Many children have had their whole attitude about eating vegetables totally changed by this program that has reached over 4000 kindergarten through sixth grade kids, and we all felt invigorated by the remarkable results the program has achieved. We all agreed that getting HGSA more involved with programs like this is a definite goal for the future.

Next, the executive chef of La Posada showed us how to make a trio of fresh salsas, using chilies and tomatoes grown from our member trials. He emphasized the connection between growing a garden from seed and cooking with fresh ingredients. We all got to enjoy the salsas he prepared at our evening wine and beer tasting. Our afternoon program finished up sweetly with a history of chocolate in the Americas and a tasting of chocolate elixirs made by Kakawa, Santa Fe chocolate experts. We tasted a variety of historical drinking chocolate combinations, including the favorite mixtures of Thomas Jefferson and other early chocolate fanciers. Dinner was a relaxed outdoor event featuring fine regional dishes.

#### **Thursday afternoon presentations:**



After dinner we all got a chance to go to the Santa Fe Fiesta, an annual Santa Fe area community tradition where local residents write down their worries and woes and place them into a huge 50 foot tall paper and wood creation called "Old Man Glum". After ceremonial fire dancing, this huge and imposing figure is torched in a really spectacular fiery display that finishes with fabulous fireworks. It was quite an evening!

**Santa Fe Fiesta:**



Friday was devoted to visiting our HGSA member trials and seeing local plant and seed companies. We started by visiting our HGSA member flower trials, grown for us by local farmer Matt Romero and his wife Emily and located at his home garden in a little town bordering the Rio Grande River. Our trials are always fascinating because everyone sees the seed varieties they have sent grown out in this most distinctive climate along with many varieties sent by seed

producing member companies.

### HGSA Flower Trials:



We had our group's picnic lunch at the site of New Mexico State's Alcalde Sustainable Agriculture Research Station where we got to tour trials and learn a lot from Center Director Steven Guldan about the many interesting vegetable and fruit crops that are being explored here for their commercial value and about sustainable agriculture in the area.

### Alcalde Research Station:



After lunch we traveled to the HGSA members vegetable variety trials, grown by market farmer Matt Romero, and adjacent to his own impressive large main market gardens. As always, we all fanned out to identify both our own and other members varieties to see how they grew in this location and looked at many new and unfamiliar varieties. Matt's vegetable knowledge and commercial assortment of vegetables, composed of both new and heirloom varieties was another highlight of this visit.

### Friday afternoon HGSA vegetable trials:



Then we piled back in the bus for quick trip into town to Newman's Nursery to find out about the packet seed business at successful long- time family owned Santa Fe garden center. We then went on for a really great tour of Santa Fe Greenhouses, a well-known mail order and retail nursery in Santa Fe, where they propagate many unusual and unique plants and from seed using techniques developed by owner and chief horticulturalist David Salman. Finally, we had a very special tour of Plants of the Southwest, an important and historic native seed nursery that has been collecting, propagating, and selling seed packets of native American seeds for many years. This was a particularly beautiful location with extensive gardens of Native American and Southwestern plants and its retail shop is an amazing straw bale building. Our hostess, proprietor Gail Haggard, told us about the history of this unique business.

### **Friday afternoon nursery and seed producers**



Back at the hotel, after our convivial closing reception everyone took advantage of the evening to stroll into town under leafy trees and past beautiful old buildings to the main square for dinner at one of the many restaurants in this colorful Santa Fe historical district.

This year we had a optional Saturday tour whose highlight was an extensive morning visit to the famous Santa Fe's farmers market which features a tantalizing and fascinating array of fresh locally grown produce, prepared food and pastry. Then we toured the excellent Georgia O'Keefe Museum just off the historic Plaza and enjoyed a fine group lunch at the Museum's boutique Café, before saying goodbye.

This year's conference provided excellent information in a particularly beautiful and traditional Santa Fe setting and more than fulfilled our conference themes of looking at the central interconnections between food, cooking and gardening from seed and landscaping with flowers that have become so central for all our members.