

A WALKING TOUR of Gold Ridge Farm

#1 Hybrid Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra* hybrid)

A hybrid of U.S. native eastern black walnuts. Beginning in the 1880s, Burbank was among the first hybridizers of American walnuts. Compare with #4 and #14 as to differences in leaves, nuts and bark.

#2 Catalpa or Indian Cigar Tree (*Catalpa bignonioides*)

A hardy, deciduous native to the Southeastern U.S. In summer, bears large, trumpet-shaped white flowers, with yellow and brown markings. Seedpods are long, thin and green and resemble beans or cigars.

#3 Shasta Daisy Collection (*Leucanthemum x superbum* varieties)

First introduced in 1901; one of Burbank's best-known introductions. He worked more than 14 years to hybridize this new species from four different kinds of daisy from Europe and Japan. It has been developed into more than 100 varieties and is the official flower of the City of Sebastopol.

#4 'Paradox' Walnut (*Juglans* 'Paradox')

Introduced in 1893. Burbank developed this fast-growing lumber tree (it requires only 15 years to mature instead of the usual 50 to 60 years) by hybridizing the English walnut (*J. regia*) with the distantly related California black walnut (*J. Hindsii*).

#5 Hybrid Chinese Chestnut (*Castanea* hybrid)

Burbank developed hybrid chestnuts from European, Japanese and Chinese species to increase their resistance to chestnut blight. This tree produces abundant crops of tasty, burr-covered nuts that are prized both by squirrels and humans.

#6 'White Seedless' Grape (*Vitis* 'white Seedless')

Similar to the 'Thompson Seedless' grape. Developed by Burbank as a table variety. (Being a teetotaler he never developed any grapes for wine production.)

#7 'Snowbank' White-fruited Blackberry (*Rubus* 'Snowbank')

Introduced in 1916 as an improved form of his original

“white” blackberry, 'Iceberg' (1894). Developed as something of a joke, it nonetheless represents a remarkable achievement. The fruit is translucent, milky-white and tastes like a normal blackberry. Nearby is the 'Mammoth' blackberry, a once popular local variety that bears very large fruit.

#8 'Royal' Hybrid Black Walnut (*Juglans* 'Royal')

This Burbank introduction (1893) is a hybrid of California black walnut (*J. Hindsii*) and Eastern (*J. nigra*). The oldest tree on the Farm (1885) it was planted as a “witness tree” (a property line marker) and still produces almost a ton of nuts annually.

#9 Hybrid Mountain Ash or Jerusalem Pear (*Sorbus domestica* hybrids)

European relatives of the apple. Trees are drought, disease and pest resistant. Burbank doubled the size of the fruit—which resembles tiny pears borne in large clusters—but died (1926) before developing its delectability. Fruit must be ripened off the tree (bletted) to be edible.

#10 'Van Deman' Quince (*Cydonia oblonga* 'Van Deman')

A popular Burbank hybrid introduced in 1893. Fruit is squat, pear-shaped, fuzzy and delicious when fully ripened and cooked. Named for Dr. H. E. Van Deman of the USDA.

#11 Loquat (*Eriobotrya japonica*)

Evergreen subtropical fruit tree from Asia. Apricot-like fruit has large seeds. This specimen was planted in 2003 in memory of Richard Keil who recalled Burbank hybrid loquats growing at the Farm when he lived here in the 1930s.

#12 Hybrid Spineless Cactus (*Opuntia* hybrid)

Burbank introduced about 60 varieties of spineless cacti. Some were grown for their fruit (prickly pears) and others for livestock fodder.

#13A Eastern Chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana melanocarpa*)

One of many cherry species grown by Burbank for use in developing new hybrid cherries. He also grew the native Western Chokecherry (*P. v. demissa*) and the Catalina Cherry (see #43).

#13B Richard Keil memorial arbor

Recreated from Keil's memory of his life at GRF as a boy in the 1930s.

#14 Multi-grafted English Walnut (*Juglans regia*)

A "mother" tree used as understock for grafting hybrid walnut seedlings so they'd grow and bear nuts more quickly. Each major branch carries a different variety.

#15 Burbank Hybrid Fruit Trees

This contemporary orchard is composed of Burbank hybrid plums, pears, peaches, apples and plumcots (plum-apricot hybrids). Tags identify the different grafted branches.

#16 Seedling Avocado (*Persea americana* selection)

Grown from the seed of an original Burbank selection, a huge old tree in Santa Rosa. Well adapted to local climate, it bears small but tasty fruit.

#17 'Himalaya' Blackberry (*Rubus* 'Himalaya')

A second-generation seedling selected from seed imported by Burbank from India. Heavy, late-summer crops of large, tasty fruit. Notoriously vigorous. Several clones have naturalized from California to Washington State.

#18 Hybrid Beach Plums (*Prunus* hybrids)

Developed by Burbank by crossing the eastern beach plum (*P. maritima*) with Japanese plums. Fruit is small, tasty and ripens very late.

#19 Grafted apples (*Malus* hybrids)

Includes Burbank's 'Winterstein' Apple (1901) a seedling of the 'Gravenstein'. It ripens two weeks later than the parent variety thus extending the season.

#20 Hybrid Chestnut (*Castanea* hybrid)

Another multi-grafted 'mother' tree (see #14) on which were grafted new hybrid seedlings.

#21 Burbank Hybrid Cherries (*Prunus* hybrids) The variety 'Burbank' (1903) was the first commercially viable cherry, developed specifically for shipping out of state. One tree was said to have more than 400 grafts on it from 1908 on. A tree with two hundred was authenticated here in 1933.

#22 Apple Fence (*Malus* hybrids)

A project of the California Rare Fruit Growers (CRFG). 27 antique apple varieties have been grafted to create an espaliered “fence” design. Behind is Burbank's yellow-and-red flowered Scotch Broom.

#23 Multi-grafted Apple Tree (*Malus* hybrids)

Another CRFG project begun in 1999.

#24 Hybrid Chestnuts (*Castanea* hybrids)

Multi-grafted trees, probably a mixture of Chinese, American and Japanese species. Bear tasty nuts in the fall.

#25 Japanese Persimmon (*Diospyros kaki* variety)

The better-known persimmon, renowned for its large, edible fruit that ripen in late fall.

#26 American Persimmons (*Diospyros virginiana*)

American natives that bear abundant, small, edible fruit in the fall. Fruit is sweet and tasty if fully ripened (bletted).

#27 Hybrid Nightshade (*Solanum* hybrid)

Rediscovered here in 1980, an unidentified Burbank hybrid. It is herbaceous (producing 6-foot stalks each year) and thorny, with large, grey-green, felt-like leaves, star-like purple-blue flowers and tiny poisonous fruit.

#28 Hybrid Chinese Hawthorn (*Crataegus pinnatifida* hybrids)

Burbank hybrids that bear large (1”) edible, scarlet fruit in fall. Part of experiments to develop hawthorns (related to apples, pears and plums) as hardy orchard fruits.

#29 Mexican Hawthorn (*Crataegus pubescens*)

Hardy, deciduous tree. Bears large (1”) yellow, tasty fruit in the fall.

#30 Blueberries (*Vaccinium corymbosum* selections)

Possibly brought here by Burbank as selections from plantings he knew during his childhood in Massachusetts. Bear small delicious fruit in summer.

#31 Penstemon (*Penstemon* hybrid) and Pomegranate (*Punica granatum* variety)

Modern varieties of plants grown by Burbank. Both

are noted on the 1916 map in the cottage.

#32 Golden Bamboo (*Phyllostachys aurea*)

Burbank noted this plant on a 1914 bill of sale and on his 1916 map (see #31). Owing to its infrequency of bloom (every 60-80 years) it probably wasn't being hybridized by him.

#33 Thornless Blackberries (*Rubus* 'Sebastopol')

The first Thornless Blackberries were selected from more than 10,000 seedlings. Fruit is sweet and tasty, ripening late. Here, growing in a dry area, it is somewhat undersized.

#34 Trifoliate Orange Hybrids (*Poncirus trifoliata* hybrids)

Viciously thorny trees from China. Hardy to 15 below zero F; used by Burbank in his (unsuccessful) experiments to develop cold-hardy citrus. Fuzzy orange fruits have about the same size, hardness and juiciness as golf balls.

#35 Hybrid Roses (*Rosa* hybrids)

Mostly non-Burbank varieties planted by Stark Bros. Nursery during their occupation of the Farm (see # 45 for Burbank roses).

#36 Mock Orange (*Philadelphus coronarius*)

Hardy, old-fashioned deciduous shrub renowned for its large, sweetly scented white flowers.

#37 Black Locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*)

Fast-growing hybrids developed by Burbank for cattle fodder (leaves and seed pods). Note European Mistletoe (*Viscum album*) that has colonized here. It is a partial parasite purposely introduced by Burbank for reasons known only to him.

#38 Hybrid Redleaf Crabapple (*Malus* hybrid)

An unidentified Burbank hybrid with deep-rose flowers and small dark-red edible fruit.

#39 Oso Berry (*Oemleria cerasiformis*)

Burbank selections (1918) of a hardy, deciduous native shrub. Bears bean-sized, edible, blue-black fruit.

#40 Hybrid White Mulberry (*Morus alba* hybrid)

Seedling from a Burbank hybrid tree developed for

feeding (the foliage) to silkworms.

#41 Hybrid Chinese Quince (*Pseudocydonia sinensis* hybrid)

Growing in its original nursery row, this sturdy Burbank hybrid bears smooth, yellow fruit of about the size and shape of a mango. Edible when ripened and cooked.

#42 Hybrid French Lilacs (*Syringa vulgaris* hybrids)

Fragrant Burbank hybrids that bear both single and double flowers of purple, lavender and white. One is bicolor.

#43 Hybrid Catalina Cherries (*Prunus ilicifolia lyonii* hybrids)

Bred from native trees that bear edible, cherry-sized fruit (mostly pit). Burbank used these in his experiments to develop new hybrid cherries.

#44 Kentucky Coffee Tree (*Gymnocladus dioica*)

A native of eastern U.S., its fruits were used as a coffee substitute. Burbank grew it because of his interest in unusual edible species.

#45 Cottage Garden

Begun in 1995, this work-in-progress continues to be developed and maintained by farm volunteers. Burbank's 'Robusta' Strawberry is the groundcover on the bank by the road. The climbing rose over the porch is his 'Blushing Beauty' and the fragrant shrub rose by the south door is the 'Burbank'. Burbank's 'Tower of Gold Poker' is to the left of the front door steps while the 'Esther Read' Shasta Daisy is to the right.

GOLD RIDGE FARM AND COTTAGE

In 1885, Luther Burbank purchased a cottage and ten acres of farmland west of Sebastopol. He later acquired more acreage, a total of 18 acres at this site. He conducted most of his plant breeding experiments here and frequently stayed in the cottage overnight instead of making the hour and a half drive to his home in Santa Rosa. When the cottage was badly damaged in the 1906 earthquake, he replaced it with the present structure at the same location.

After Burbank's death in 1926, his farm and cottage gradually deteriorated until the Western Sonoma County Historical Society began restoration in 1980. The refurbished cottage and remaining three acres of Gold Ridge

Farm are now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In 1997, using an old photograph as a guide, the Society built a replica of Burbank's barn; the original, nearby to the southeast, had burned down in 1967. The present barn and greenhouse are a boon to farm maintenance and replication of various Burbank varieties. Many of these are offered for sale every Wednesday from 9 am to noon.

For more information about Luther Burbank and his work please see Peter Dreyer's *A Gardener Touched With Genius*, Luther Burbank Home & Gardens, publisher, 3rd ed., 1993. This edition also includes the valuable monograph *Luther Burbank's Plant Contributions* by Walter L. Howard, 1945, in which many of the plants on this farm are mentioned.

To find out more about the Western Sonoma County Historical Society, make donations to our preservation efforts, or enjoy a docent guided tour of the farm, please write to or call us at:

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Luther Burbank's GOLD RIDGE EXPERIMENT FARM

