



Altadena Hiker

By **Karin Bugge** March 8, 2011

OPINION

Meet RIPE Altadena, the Local Produce Exchange

If you want to meet other local gardeners and exchange locally grown food, these are the guys to get to know. We live in a Mediterranean climate. (For now, anyway. Check back in a few years for a possible update.)



PHOTOS (2)



A Mediterranean climate is characterized by wet winters, dry summers, long growing seasons, and the choice of almost any landscape option barring arctic tundra. In the past, many homes opted for roses, lawn, and other thirsty plants that required human intervention to nurse them through the dry periods. Increasingly, we're experimenting with ecologically kinder, gentler solutions, such as California natives and succulents.

But one big change in our landscaping aesthetic is food. As in growing your own. As in growing your own fruits and vegetables right there in the front yard, rather than relegating the activity to a hidden corner out back.

Around here, growing your own food is a competitive sport, second only to hiking. We challenge each other. But those who race ahead, pass the baton.

That's where RIPE (Residential In-season Produce Exchange) Altadena comes in.

RIPE Altadena is a community of organic gardeners in Altadena and Pasadena, with members as far afield as Pomona and San Dimas. Group members are generous, fun, and, dare I say, incredible show-offs.

A little background. RIPE Altadena (formerly COFE) was started by local resident Gail Murphy in 2007 as a way for Altadena gardeners to swap their excess bounty.

It didn't take long for the concept to take hold. And it didn't take long for the concept to morph from sharing community produce to sharing a sense of community. RIPE Altadena has around 200 members, a [website \(http://www.ripealtadena.com/\)](http://www.ripealtadena.com/), a [Facebook \(http://www.facebook.com/AltadenaCA/posts/182599608449833#!/RIPEAltadena\)](http://www.facebook.com/AltadenaCA/posts/182599608449833#!/RIPEAltadena) page (<http://www.facebook.com/AltadenaCA/posts/182599608449833#!/RIPEAltadena>), and a really vital email exchange (members only).

To date, RIPE has sponsored and organized classes in cheese-making, garlic growing, grafting, canning, raw milk, square foot gardening, and grinding acorn flour. Future classes include saving and storing your own seeds and making your own non-toxic household cleaning supplies.

But the cornerstone of the group remains the monthly produce swap, held the fourth Sunday of every month.

So back to the show-offs. The primary qualification for RIPE membership is growing and sharing something from your own yard. And as I member, I do, but in very modest quantities. Not that I'm stingy, just a very mediocre gardener. So I join the park swap with my little box of whatever I've been lucky enough not to kill, plus kale. Always kale. Because kale grows like a weed for me. Personally, I think kale is a weed, but whatever.

And then along comes the other members, not with a similar box of wizened offerings, but with wagons – I kid you not – wagons full of garlic, onions, seedlings, lettuce, peas, beans, apples; and then processed foods – jams, breads, relishes, pickles, juices, cheeses.

But to their credit, RIPE Altadena is a nice and generous group of show-offs. Every time, someone will push a bag of goodness my way saying, "Gee Karin, more kale? Just what I wanted."

I love these guys.

To visit the website and for membership information: <http://www.ripealtadena.com/>

Take a test drive: The next park swap is at Farnsworth Park, March 27th, from 5 p.m. All you have to do is bring edibles you've grown, as an exchange. (You never know what will be on offer, but I'll just bet there's some kale.)

Are you a member of RIPE? Tell us in the comments.

Interested in a follow-up to this article?

About this column: Altadena resident Karin Bugge writes about the outdoors, animals, gardening, and other pursuits of Altadena residents. She will also be writing a "Pet of the Week" feature for Patch. She blogs at <http://altadenahiker.blogspot.com/>

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COMMENTS (5)

michele Zack

5:10pm on Tuesday, March 8, 2011

I am a proud member of RIPE, which is full of great gardeners who generously share what they know with all comers. As a proud member of Altadena Heritage, I would like to add that several workshops mentioned above were co-sponsored with Heritage, which happily lent a hand with publicity, notifying members via email and postcards, and securing use of Community Center as a free venue. But there's no doubt that RIPE supplies the gardener-leaders — it is a great pleasure to live in a place where groups work together to bring good things to the community.

Barbara Ellis

8:26pm on Thursday, March 10, 2011

One question: Isn't everyone trying to swap citrus at the moment?

But I really loved reading this. It made me laugh, especially the thought of your wizened offerings, which is what I would bring. All that talk of canning and bottling and jamming and exchange of plenty takes me back to my childhood, a time before freezers, when the summer seemed to be taken up with food preservation. relatives would drop in with bucket-loads of cherries or cucumbers or whatever was in season, and my granny would spend all day bottling the cherries or making gherkins out of the cucumbers. Nowadays, fruits and vegetables are available year-round, but they doesn't taste the same. Good luck to RIPE!

Lori A. Webster

2:04pm on Sunday, March 13, 2011

Love RIPE.....only wish I was home long enough to grow something to swap!



Susan Campisi

12:48am on Monday, March 14, 2011

I would love to be a part of RIPE, but I've never grown anything edible in my life. (I shouldn't announce that here.) Maybe I can learn how to grow organic goodies from my neighbors when I move to Altadena. Karin, maybe you can you teach me how to grow kale. Or is there room for only one kale farmer in this bunch?



Karin Bugge

9:24pm on Monday, March 14, 2011

Susan, when you finally get up here, it will be my pleasure. (And garlic. I have loads of garlic. And lettuce and peas. After the last rain, things are looking lush.)