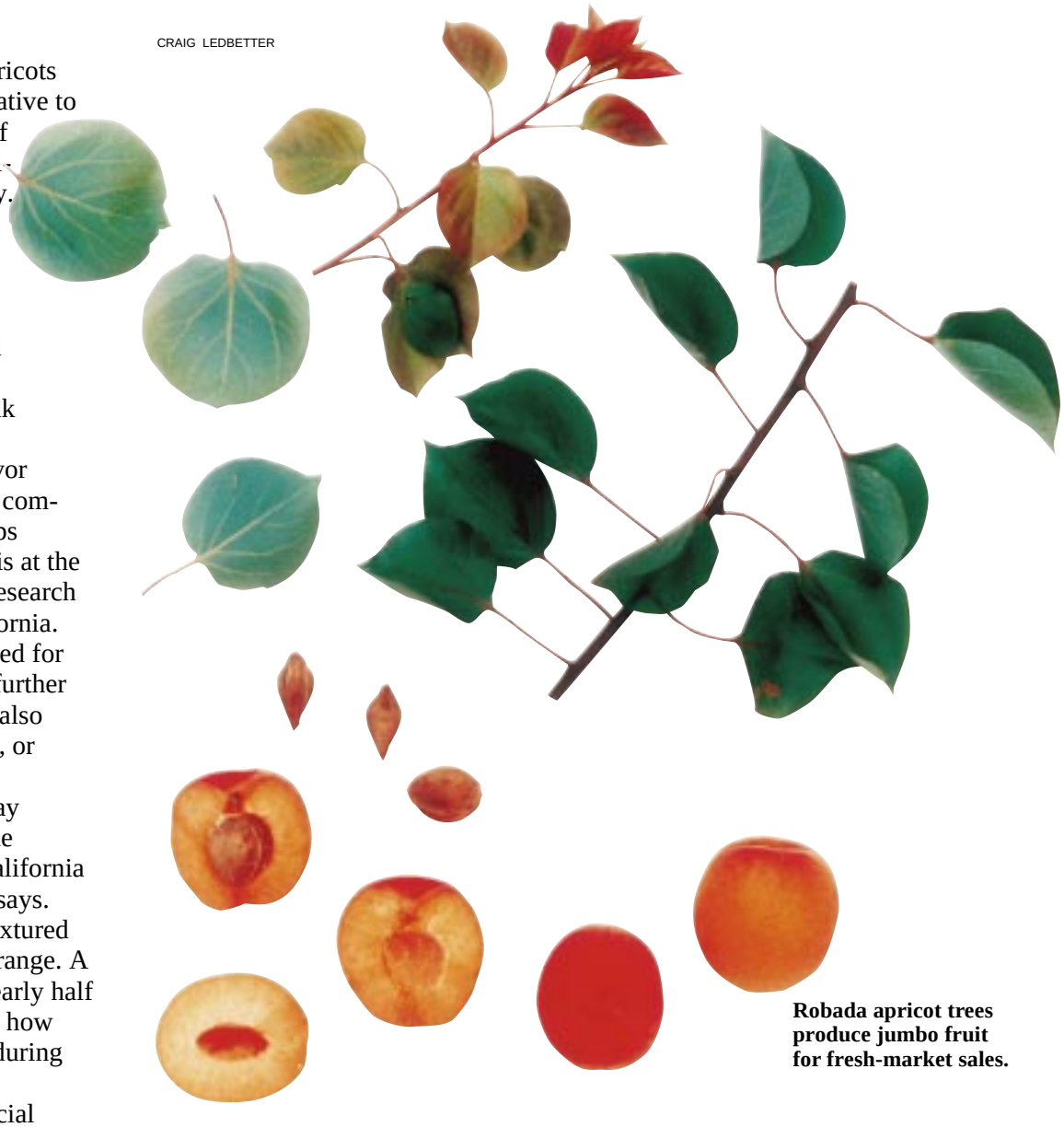
New Robada's a Superb Apricot

CRAIG LEDBETTER



Robada apricot trees produce jumbo fruit for fresh-market sales.

Big and juicy Robada apricots give U.S. growers an alternative to the five standard varieties of this fruit grown commercially in the United States today.

"Robada," says Agricultural Research Service geneticist Craig A. Ledbetter, "has a pleasant balance of natural sugars, acids, and aromatic compounds. People who've tasted it think it's outstanding!

"Robada offers more flavor and aroma than many other commercial apricots. And it ships well," says Ledbetter, who is at the ARS Horticultural Crops Research Laboratory in Fresno, California.

The jumbo fruit is intended for fresh-market sales, though further testing may reveal that it is also suitable for drying, canning, or freezing.

Robada ripens in mid-May through nearly the end of the month—"the peak of the California apricot harvest," Ledbetter says. The apricot's firm, finely textured flesh is an attractive deep orange. A bright-red blush may tint nearly half of its surface, depending on how much sun reaches the fruit during ripening.

Like most other commercial apricots, Robada is self-pollinating, meaning that each tree will bear fruit without the need for other apricot trees to be planted nearby as pollen sources.

Robada is the result of four consecutive hybridizations of different sets of parent trees. Those crosses, made by horticulturist David W. Ramming of the Fresno laboratory, were followed by 8 years of orchard observation by Ledbetter and Ramming.

ARS has obtained a patent for the apricot. Commercial nurseries can apply to the ARS Office of Technology Transfer for a license to produce Robada trees.

Though the Fresno research results apply primarily to California orchards, Robada might be suitable for other U.S. regions where apricots are grown. California produces nearly all of America's apricots. The state's 1996 harvest of 76,000 tons was worth $32 million to growers.—By **Marcia Wood,** ARS.

For further information about U.S. Plant Patent Number 9,890, "Apricot cv. Robada," contact Craig A. Ledbetter, USDA-ARS Horticultural Crops Research Laboratory, 2021 S. Peach Ave., Fresno, CA 93727; phone (209) 453-3064, fax (209) 453-3088, e-mail jlitster@qnis.net ◆