



Banana Man

A hillside covered with banana plants. The lush green tropical setting may look like South America, but it's right here in the Golden State. It's a field of dreams for landscape designer Doug Richardson. Doug said, "The more I got to know about bananas the more I realized that this might in fact be the crop that I could afford to grow."

Doug Richardson is absolutely bananas about exotic bananas. In the early 1900's he had the only substantial planting in California, along the 101 freeway north of Ventura. The Seaside Banana Garden as it was known came to be a real attraction on the coast. And banana growers and scientists around the world knew about it. It was a spectacular sight to see for both tourists and scientists, but unfortunately Mother Nature took its toll on the plantation.

The winter of 1995, during an incredibly wet winter, we had a landslide followed six days later by a debris flow, which flowed through the banana field. And that was the end of Doug's dream of growing bananas, until he met Cricket Wilson. Cricket said, "We were building a home here in Capentria and we hired Doug Wilson to do a fire and erosion control plan for us." Doug had the perfect solution, how about banana plants?

"We planted the banana plants along the contours of the slopes, completely surrounding the home. The bananas are our fire escape, because they're 85 percent water, full of moisture, they're very fire retardant," says Doug. Doug planted 1500 banana plants around the property in Capentria. In between the rows of plants he planted five lineal miles worth of sturdy vetiver grass for erosion control to avoid repeating the past.

Cricket isn't the only one reaping the rewards of her homegrown bananas. At the local Garden Market, which is run by Cricket and Doug's wife Lisa, customers are excited to see that exotic bananas are back. With names like Rajapuri, Mysore, Jamaican Red and even a variety called Ice Cream. Thanks to Crickets land and Doug's perseverance it's a mutual relationship that's allowing bananas to grow strong once again.

