

# History of the Moapa Valley Art Guild's Pomegranate Art Festival

The Pomegranate Art Festival has been a local tradition in the rural Moapa Valley, outside of Las Vegas, Nevada, for going on fourteen years. From a small beginning it has grown into a first class area arts event and a much-loved tradition in the valley. It is well attended, attracting Las Vegas locals and tourists, as well as the southern Utah population. It is estimated that last year's festival had 8,000 to 10,000 in attendance.

The Festival was conceived to celebrate the area's fine arts and crafts and the harvest season of pomegranates grown in the Moapa Valley. Much of the art work displayed features either Southwest or pomegranate themes.

But how did the pomegranate get its start here, since it is not a native fruit? Back around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Mormon farmers followed in the footsteps of ancient native farmers. The valley was once home to ancient Pueblo cultures that mined salt for trade, built multistoried villages and constructed irrigation channels to farm the region. Their occupation spanned hundreds of years until about 800 years ago. When the Mormons arrived, Paiute tribal groups still nurtured small fields of traditional crops such as beans, corn and squash.

The Mormons introduced livestock to the valley, developing it into a horse, cattle and dairying center. They also introduced many vegetables and fruits that helped to provide variety in the diets of early Clark County residents, and for a while were even exported to California via the railroad from Moapa. They found that the fruits common to the Holy Land such as figs, apricots, grapes and pomegranates thrived in this similar desert climate.

Moapa Valley still boasts pomegranate orchards, prolific small trees with beautiful fruit full of gemlike seeds. The festival celebrates these handsome red fruits that ripen from September to early December. Health studies accord accolades to the fruit for being a rich source of antioxidants, fiber, vitamin C, potassium and niacin.

The Moapa Valley Art Guild organized the Pomegranate Art Festival over a decade ago as a way of raising funds for art-related activities locally. They sell both the large fresh fruit and jars of ruby-red jelly, as well as spaces for artists and other vendors. If you intend to buy the jelly, arrive early at the festival as the supplies of the freshly made jelly are limited.

Artists and crafters from Moapa Valley and all over the region are there to exhibit and sell their creations. With its date a few weeks before Christmas, it has proved to be an excellent place for shoppers to find unique and special treasures, including gifts for Christmas and other occasions.