

15. Harvesting

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Use picking bags when harvesting fruit

INTRODUCTION

Lemons can be harvested either when fully coloured, at the silver (yellow-green) stage or green if being degreened using ethylene. In California where they cure and store fruit for long periods there are four colour grades: tree ripe yellow; silver (yellow-green); light green and dark green: Fruit can be strip picked or selectively picked for size and colour depending on market requirements.

Lemons are normally hand-picked using the twist, tilt and snap method. Fruit are generally not picked using clippers. Fruit should not be "plugged" (the button pulled out) and the entire fruit stem should be removed.

Fruit should not be harvested in cold (<13°C) or hot (>35°C) conditions. Fruit should not be harvested when wet and turgid as oleocellosis is likely to develop. Oleocellosis develops when the oil glands rupture and the oil burns the fruit surface. The burn can take 2-3 days to develop. Lemons are particularly susceptible to rind damage when they are picked green as they are more turgid.



A small cherry picker used to harvest fruit from tall trees

BEST PRACTICE HARVESTING TIPS

- ✓ use clean picking bags (up to 25 kg capacity).
- ✓ wear cotton picking gloves. This reduces puncture marks from fingernails and jewellery.
- ✓ keep fingernails short.
- ✓ make sure field bins are clean and free of debris/protruding objects (old fruit, leaves, twigs, nails, snails etc).
- ✓ when picking fruit use the twist, tilt and snap method.
- ✓ when clipping fruit, clip close to the button.
- ✓ gently lower fruit from picking bags into field bins. (Don't let fruit drop from a height >25cm).



Photo by Greg Moulds

Don't leave stems on fruit

Harvesting

- ✓ drive fruit slowly from the field to the shed.
- ✓ check picking ladders are stable.
- ✓ keep field bins in the shade.
- ✓ fill field bins to the top edge or just below.
- ✗ don't harvest wet or cold (<13°C) fruit. When wet turgid fruit is handled the oil glands can be ruptured and the released oil burns the fruit surface causing oleocellosis.
- ✗ when harvesting green fruit don't pick early in the morning.
- ✗ don't harvest fruit in hot conditions (>35°C).
- ✗ don't pick fruit off the ground.
- ✗ don't pick rotten or mouldy fruit.
- ✗ don't leave field bins in the hot sun.
- ✗ don't plug fruit.
- ✗ don't leave the stem on fruit.
- ✗ when picking, don't lean too far over the ladder as you may fall.
- ✗ when picking, don't stand on the top rung of the ladder.



Photo by Greg Moulds

Plastic field bins are easier to maintain and keep clean



Photo by Greg Moulds

Do not harvest wet fruit

Key References

Citrus Harvesting booklet. April 1999. Citrus Growers of South Australia.
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