

# The Culture of Meyer Lemon Trees

A CITRUS fruit which in recent years has gained much favour with the New Zealand home gardener and commercial citrus orchardist is the Meyer lemon. It is a sweet orange-lemon hybrid that comes into early fruiting and for its size bears a profuse crop of useful, attractive fruit. The Meyer is hardier than any of the standard lemon varieties, and it has proved especially valuable for cultivation in localities where the climate is slightly too severe for ordinary lemons. Being evergreen, it may serve a dual purpose by supplying the domestic grower with lemons and providing an excellent ornamental tree for the front lawn or garden. Though the flavour is distinctly different from that of the standard lemon, the Meyer is used and appreciated by many people as a substitute or alternative. The culture and harvesting of Meyer lemons are described in this article by F. L. Bailey, Orchard Instructor, Department of Agriculture, Tauranga.



[Rendell's Photo Service photo.]

THE Meyer lemon was introduced into New Zealand some years ago from the United States of America. The variety was obtained by Frank N. Meyer, an agricultural explorer of the United States Department of Agriculture, at Fengtai, near Peking, China, and was taken to the United States in 1908. In China it was used as an ornament, grown from cuttings as a pot plant. It has been so commonly referred to in citrus districts of the United States as the Meyer lemon that this name has come to be generally recognised as its proper designation.

The fruit is smooth, thin skinned, of medium size, and less elongated in shape than the standard lemon. It is a deep, golden-yellow, has a beautiful texture, and is exceptionally juicy. The fruits are not as acid and highly flavoured as the standard lemons, but are acceptable to people who prefer a mild-flavoured fruit.

Until 1940 commercial planting in New Zealand was not extensive, but during recent years an increased demand for the fruit has led to a fairly-rapid expansion of planting in areas suitable for its culture. Expansion during the past 8 years no doubt would have been greater but for a shortage of trees.

Production of Meyer lemons on a commercial scale is at present confined to areas in the Kerikeri, Auckland, and Tauranga districts and, to a less extent, Gisborne. At the beginning of 1948 the distribution of Meyer lemon trees in registered orchards throughout the Dominion was as follows; the figures do not include trees in private gardens:—

Kerikeri	.. .. .	3,916
Auckland	.. .. .	1,991
Tauranga	.. .. .	2,178
Gisborne	.. .. .	405
Other North Island districts	.. .. .	537
South Island	.. .. .	319
<b>Total</b>	<b>.. .. .</b>	<b>9,346</b>

Most of the trees planted are comparatively young and, with the inclusion of plantings likely in the immediate future, there is every indication that commercial production will increase steadily during the next few years.

## Selection of Site

In common with other kinds of citrus, the Meyer lemon is subject to damage by frosts, so commercial planting is limited to the recognised citrus-producing areas in Auckland

Province. Scope for expansion probably exists in certain selected areas of Hawke's Bay and Nelson Provinces, where citrus fruit is grown on a limited scale. In home gardens in various parts of the North Island, and in the north of the South Island, the variety can be grown where planting is confined to warm, favoured positions and young trees are protected adequately from frosts and cold winds.

For commercial production flat to gently-sloping land with a northerly or north-easterly aspect is most desirable for both warmth and ease of management. A good, friable soil overlying a subsoil that will not impede natural drainage is essential, for citrus trees generally are intolerant of waterlogged conditions. On the other hand, they tend to be shallow rooting, and a regular, well-distributed rainfall is necessary to ensure an adequate supply of moisture to the trees. In districts where prolonged dry spells occur during summer the provision of an ample water supply is wise so that irrigation may be resorted to if necessary.



Portion of a healthy young Meyer lemon orchard.

[Rendell's Photo Service photo.]