

Harvesting

Citrus Growing Manual, 1999

Overseeing the harvest

Continual monitoring of harvest conditions, supervising pickers, liaison with your packer and keeping records is essential for a successful harvest.

Employers should be aware that under OH&S legislation they have an obligation to provide a safe working environment and to ensure that pickers use safe work practices:

- all equipment and machinery should be in good operating condition
- employees using that machinery and equipment should be trained in its safe operation
- any employees handling chemicals need appropriate training in chemical handling and storage.
- all employees handling fruit need appropriate training.

Employers should ensure they meet Government regulations with regard to employment, workers compensation, superannuation and taxation. If further information is required, contact your local Department of Labour or industry body.

Training pickers

Prior to the commencement of the season, or as new or occasional pickers are employed, training should be provided to ensure they can use equipment and machinery safely and effectively and pick fruit to the required standard. Training should cover:

- safe working procedures
- operation of harvesting equipment, if used
- careful handling
- avoiding rind damage
- the need to report to the supervisor or owner anything unusual concerning the fruit
- personal hygiene.

Pickers should be supervised at all stages of fruit harvest. If fruit is not being harvested or handled correctly, pickers should be informed. Show pickers the '*Citrus Harvesting*' video available from local CITTgroup coordinators.

Picking for quality

To ensure harvested fruit is not damaged, pickers should be informed of the following requirements:

- gloves should be worn
- finger nails should be short
- bags must be emptied carefully
- fruit should not be dropped into bags
- bags or bins should not be overfilled
- **Windfalls, or dropped fruit should not be put into bins. Check with the packing shed for the correct procedure.**
- fruit that is to be gassed for colour should be handled with special care
- bins of fruit should be driven slowly to the packing shed or depot.

Picking methods

Snap method

Grasp the fruit in the hand with the hand facing forward, then lift the fruit until it is in a horizontal position. The fruit will snap off at the stem with a downward motion of the hand.

Fruit harvested early in the season will snap more easily.

Only pick one piece of fruit at a time.

If the fruit is easily damaged, use snips.

Using snips

Roll the fruit away to expose the stem. Cut the stem as near as possible to the fruit.

Some markets require snipped fruit. Check with your packer or exporter.

Growers or packers may require some premium quality citrus to be double snipped.

Roll the fruit away to expose the stem. Cut the stem and leave 1 cm length. Remove fruit from canopy and with a second cut remove the remaining piece of stem as close as possible to the fruit.

Weather and seasonal conditions

Winter

Only harvest in the warmer part of the day as harvesting turgid, cold fruit can cause the release of rind oil and rind breakdown (oleocellosis). Pick fruit from the northern side of trees in the morning.

Avoid irrigating navels for at least two weeks before harvest.

During warmer weather

Do not pick hot fruit. Pick early in the morning or when it is cool and avoid picking during the hottest part of the day.

- Avoid picking from trees that are heat or water stressed.
- Keep picking equipment in the shade when not in use.
- Cover picked fruit with hessian or shade cloth to reduce moisture stress or loss before it is transported to the depot.
- Do not leave picked fruit exposed to the sun.
- Ensure picked fruit is transported to the packing shed within 24 hours.

Transportation of harvested fruit

Transporting fruit

- To avoid fruit bruising and abrasion, drive slowly over rough or unmade roads.
- Ensure fruit is delivered within 24 hours to the packing shed so it can be treated quickly with fungicide.

Note that it is a requirement of many packers and exporters that they sight Operations and Spraying records for properties providing them with fruit for export. In some instances property inspections may be carried out.

Enter details of the harvest on Harvesting record sheets. Once all the packout information is in, collate onto Production Summary record sheets.