

Citrus in the Southwest

Topic: Citrus

Garden History

We moved into our home 50 years ago. It was my parents who inspired us to add citrus trees to our garden. My yards were an empty canvas to work with except for the Bermuda grass in the backyard, which took a year to remove. While I have 18 citrus trees (11 varieties), my favorites are the Ponderosa Lemon and the Finger Lime (also known as lime caviar). Many friends visiting my garden think the Ponderosa Lemon is a grapefruit: the yields are abundant, the fruit quite large, and you can make several pies with just one lemon. Two Meiwa Kumquats sweeten my garden, and I enjoy eating both the pulp and skin for their taste. For pops of color, I have added roses and geraniums, most in containers, succulents in the backyard with several varieties of peppers: chiltepin, serranoes, jalapeños, and Hungarian Wax peppers.

Garden Basics

Irrigation: I use a variety of irrigation methods: manual (three times/week for the Finger Limes in containers); drip irrigation—11 lines in the front and 4 lines in the backyard to meet the plants' requirements; two 900-gallon rainwater tanks water the Ponderosa and many citrus varieties watering once a week (deep watering to 3 feet) as well as utilizing the rainwater for flowering containers. I add no additives to my soil, all native soil in the ground, and potting soil is added in containers. I mulch to keep moisture in and weeds out of the tree wells.

Fertilizer: For the citrus trees, I use Citrus Food and Chelated Iron. Until I became a Master Gardener, I did not fertilize my citrus. As a Master Gardener, I began fertilizing my established citrus on these holidays: Valentine's Day, Memorial Day, Fourth of July, and Labor Day. For the roses, flowers and peppers, I use Soluble Plant Food bi-weekly during spring and summer and monthly during fall and winter.

Pest Control: I have been fortunate that I have no bugs on the citrus. However, aphids have attacked my roses. I use Dawn dishwashing liquid in a spray bottle (1/2 teaspoon to a quart of water) once a year after I prune my rose bushes, and that seems to control the aphids.

Garden Philosophy

I love being in the garden year-round, picking fruit to just eat or cook with, and sharing with friends and family. The winter limes are used in cocktails, fresh garnishes, jams and marmalades. The home-grown chiltepins, jalapeños and serranoes are used in my recipes handed down by family traditions, and are incorporated into my cookbook *!Buen Provecho! Treasured Secret Flavors*, because what I do is inspired by the love of my mother and honoring the role food plays in our family traditions.