

TAHITIAN LIME (Persian Lime)

Limes have many uses, including jams, jellies, marmalade and garnishing fish and other main dishes. The fruit is sold commercially as fresh fruit and also for processing although the Tahitian lime is preferred as fresh fruit because it is considered unsuitable for lime cordial products.

The name "Tahitian" was given to the lime when the fruit was introduced from Tahiti to California. However, with the introduction of this variety into Australia in 1824 (possibly from Brazil) the fruit was then more commonly called the Persian lime.

DESCRIPTION

Large sized lime, generally 5 - 7 cm long and 4 - 6 cm in diameter. Colour of the fruit is green and pale lemon/yellow at maturity. The fruit has a distinct lime flavour and a moderate to high acidic level. The flesh at maturity is green and pulpy. Sold mainly as fresh fruit, Tahitian limes rarely have seeds and are excellent for growing in many areas of Australia.

PRODUCTION OF LIME TREES

Main crop harvest will vary with seasonal conditions and districts.

- January to March on the far North Coast areas.
- February to March on the Central Coast.
- April to July in cooler districts.

The trees have little thorns and are moderately vigorous, growing from 2 to 4 metres high. Size depends on soil and rootstocks.

Lime trees have the highest heat requirements of all citrus fruits and therefore grown in tropical or sub-tropical areas where better fruit quality is obtained.

The trees grow continuously and are sensitive to cold. The Tahitian lime is slightly more cold resistant than other varieties, however frosts can damage both foliage and fruit.

PROPAGATION AND ROOTSTOCKS

Rough lemon and Poncirus Trifoliata have proved satisfactory for Tahitian limes in small commercial plantings and in home gardens. Poncirus Trifoliata rootstocks produce smaller trees than the rough lemon and can therefore be planted closer together.

PLANTING

Requirements for soils are similar to those of lemons. Good drainage is essential and a soil PH in the range of 5.5 to 7.5, according to the rootstock used. If Citrus Nematode, alkalinity and salinity are present then consideration should be given to site preparation and selection of rootstock.

Tahitian limes require tree spacing of 3 to 4 metres within the row and 5 to 6 metres between rows under coastal conditions. 412 to 632 trees per hectare. If there is a risk of early or late frosts, planting should be done in the spring to allow the trees to become established.

Trees should be planted with the bud union well above ground level. Form a basin around the planted tree and apply about 10 litres of water to remove air pockets and consolidate the soil.

NUTRITION

Requirements differ according to soil types. Generally, in the non-bearing period, lime trees will require some nitrogen, phosphorus and some potassium fertiliser at rates similar to those for non-bearing lemons.

Young trees may need nitrogen in three separate applications through the growing season and phosphorous in one application. Potassium may be required for sandy soils with a low clay content.

Mature trees require fertilising at about 50 per cent the rate for mature lemon trees. Base all applications on foliage observations and analysis, taking into account cropping, tree density, soil type and rootstocks.

HARVESTING

Limes for the fresh fruit market should be selectively hand picked from the trees. Processing fruit is allowed to fall from the trees when mature and can be harvested from the ground.

Limes are not suitable for long cold storage. Prolonged exposure to the cold can result in the development of yellow rind colour. Tahitian limes may be temporarily stored for 6 to 8 weeks in controlled cold storage.

