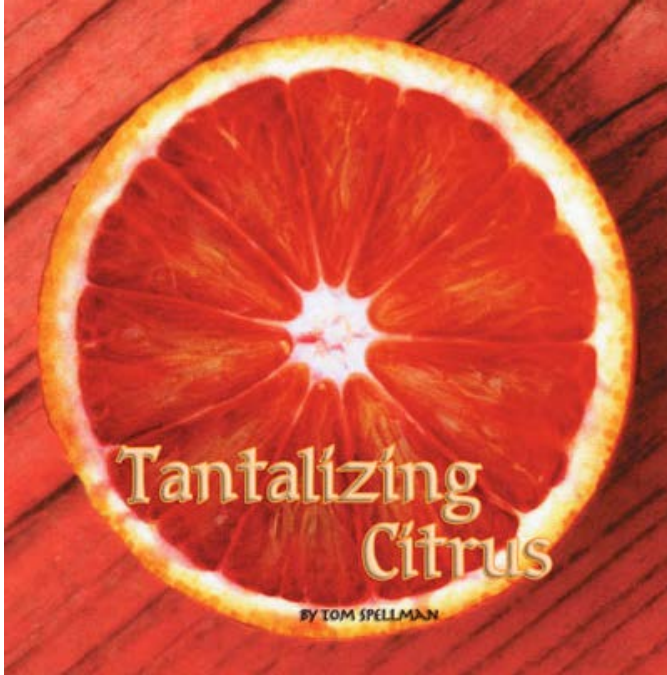




# A Garden Compass Re-Publication

...by Dave Wilson Nursery 



by Tom Spellman

**Citrus trees tantalize the senses** with their striking stature, beautiful blossoms and fragrance second to none.

The perfume of blooming citrus is an unforgettable fragrance.

Apart from these distinctive qualities, citrus would still remain a worthwhile landscape plant.

However, the most tantalizing attribute for fruit gardeners is the taste. Here, citrus exhibits a wide range of flavors, from the extreme sour acid taste of Rangpur lime to the mouthwatering, sweet flavor of California honey mandarin and everything in between.

Citrus adapts to many uses in the garden. Trees can be planted singly,

or with high-density planting techniques like multi-planting (up to four plants in one hole), hedgerow and espalier. Citrus also make wonderful container plants, and dwarf varieties can produce for years in a large container (20- to 40-gallon capacity). Container growing also expands the range of temperatures in which citrus can be grown, since pots are easier to cover or move to shelter.

For best results, citrus should be grown in full sun and well-drained soil. Mulching is also extremely important. The trees thrive with a 2- to 4-inch layer of compost around them. Citrus can also be pruned throughout the spring and summer to keep their size and shape in check.

## Oranges

**The two primary orange types are navel oranges and Valencia oranges.**

The navel is the stereotypical dessert orange that is eaten fresh. Its fruit is large, seedless, easy peeling and sweet, with a small inverted navel at the blossom end.

**The navel orange is responsible for California's Second Gold Rush**, the development and expansion of California's early citrus industry along with the early real estate booms of southern and central California.

Many navel orange cultivars are in production today, but my favorite is still the parent, the Washington navel. It is unsurpassed by the new varieties for size, shape, uniformity and, most important, flavor. The Washington navel fruit holds well on the tree. In fact, my tree growing in Upland, California, produces from January to June.

**If you're looking for something slightly different, consider the Cara Cara pink navel.**

Cara Cara has everything to offer that the Washington navel has, plus a beautiful reddish pink interior flesh. The sweet oranges ripen from January through March.

**The Fukomoto navel** is another intriguing fruit. This orange is an early ripening variety from Japan. In Southern California it ripens as early as mid-November. Fukomoto is my favorite of the early season navels.

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**Mandarin is one of those categories that include dozens of cultivars.**

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**Remember, all true limes turn yellow when fully ripe.**

**Those going to market are picked green**, so consumers don't confuse them with lemons on the produce shelf.

**In recent years, the popularity of pummelos in California has grown dramatically.**

**The main production variety is Chandler. It is a pink-fleshed variety that can grow to several pounds, nearly as large as a soccer ball! The flesh is sweet, but to eat it properly, it should be segmented from the rind.**

**Valencia** has long been considered the standard of the juice orange industry. They are thin skinned and smaller than navels and have some seeds. The Valencia season extends from April through October. Although Valencia oranges do not peel as well as navels, they are easily sliced and the quality of Valencia juice is unequaled. Fresh juice can last from two to four weeks under refrigerated conditions. In recent years, a new seedless Valencia showing much promise is the Midnight. The fruit is completely seedless, larger than average and of exceptional flavor. It also ripens about a month earlier than the Valencia. With a staggered planting of early, midseason and late navels and Valencias, one could expect to harvest oranges almost year-round.

## Blood Oranges

**Blood oranges are among the most fascinating citrus.** Popular in Europe and the Mediterranean for centuries, only in recent years have they become popular in the West.

**The three main varieties are Moro, Sanguinelli and Tarocco.**

**Moro** is probably the most reliable for color and adaptability. Fruit color can range from bright red to dark purple. It has a hint of berry-like and somewhat spicy flavor. Fruit is borne in clusters and has few to no seeds. Moro tends to produce heavy in alternate years and ripens from December to April, showing its best color and flavor at the end of February.



**Sanguinelli** is of Spanish origin and ripens a little later than most blood oranges, from March to June in most parts of California. Sanguinelli is a medium-sized fruit with an oblong egg shape. Its color is not as deep as Moro, and it colors best in the warmer inland valleys. Its flavor is delicious and slightly less acidic than Moro, and it has only a few seeds.

**Tarocco** is of Italian origin. It has the largest sized fruit of all the blood oranges and is also considered by many to taste the best. Unfortunately, its color can sometimes be lackluster, usually only mottled or slightly blushed. Tarocco definitely colors best in the inland and desert valleys. The oranges are fairly easy to peel and have few to no seeds. Tarocco ripens from February to May.

## Mandarins

**Is it a mandarin or a tangerine? Actually, all tangerines are mandarins.**

**The term "tangerine" has no botanical meaning.** The moniker appears to have originated as a market or trade name for some highly pigmented varieties that show a bright, dark-orange skin color. Mandarin is one of those categories that include dozens of cultivars. The following three are probably my favorites.

**Owari Satsuma** is arguably the best of all the Satsuma cultivars.

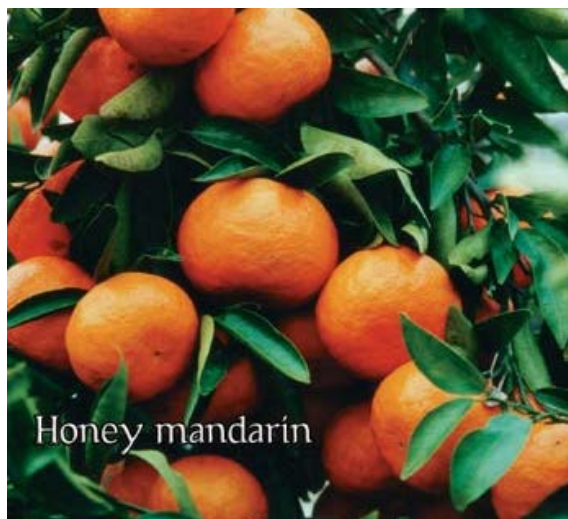
It begins to ripen in late October and remains in the tree until February. It is seedless, easy peeling and fruit size ranges from small to large. I find the best flavor comes from the small to medium-sized fruit with the typical flat shape. Satsuma trees are compact and spreading, almost self-dwarfing and frost hardy to about 20°F.

**Honey mandarin** is often confused with the Murcott mandarin, which is sold as **Florida Honey tangerine**. My favorite is the **California Honey**, with small and seedy fruit that is not commercially acceptable.

**In my opinion, the California Honey has the best flavor and aroma of all mandarins.** It truly tastes like spiced honey. The tree is small and upright with a dark willow leaf, and the fruit ripens January through April.

Last, but not least, is the **Gold Nugget mandarin**, developed years ago, only recently released by the University of California. Gold Nugget boasts qualities of good flavor and seedless fruit, but is very late in ripening—from March to mid-summer. Yes, mandarins in July! The fruit is medium in size and the tree is upright.

With these three varieties, you can enjoy homegrown mandarins 10 months out of the year.



## Lemons and Limes

Lemons and limes have a shared heading due to their similarities. Both are used for their juice as flavorings and culinary enhancements. While neither is considered a sweet fruit, there are low-acid selections. Still, both are primarily used for their acidic character.

The two most familiar varieties of lemons are **Eureka**, the true market lemon, and **Meyer**, the smooth-skinned, sweeter, less acidic variety. Also notable is the **Variegated Pink Eureka**, usually sold under the trade name **Pink Lemonade**. This form has all the good points of Eureka plus it has a beautiful white and green variegated foliage and twig. Young fruits are also variegated and turn completely yellow when fully ripe. The flesh is blushed pink.

### Another distinctive lemon in the California market is the sweet lemon.

The cultivar **Pomona Sweet** has a strong, aromatic sweet flavor but still maintains its acidity. It has been the secret ingredient in my fresh homemade salsa for years. **The Ponderosa lemon**, often called the "football" lemon, is a citron-lemon hybrid that can weigh more than 2 pounds.

### There are two main types of limes.

The most common lime grown in California is the large, fruited **Bearss lime** or "**Persian**" lime. The fruit has a smooth rind, and it is juicy and aromatic. The limes are seedless and ripen from August to late spring (about eight months out of the year). The tree is compact, with dark green glossy foliage, and is less thorny than the **Mexican lime**.

**The Mexican lime**, also known as the **Key lime** in Florida, is also a popular variety. The fruit is smaller than the Bearss, very aromatic and flavorful, with a true lime taste. The Mexican lime has seeds and is not as frost hardy as the Bearss. The Mexican lime is sometimes referred to as the "bartender's lime." In recent years, a cultivar of thornless Mexican lime has entered the market with all the benefits of the old strain minus the weaponry.

Another variety of lime is the **Palestine sweet lime**, sometimes just called sweet lime. Unlike sweet lemon, it is almost acidless. Cooks who prepare Asian or Middle Eastern cuisine should try the **Kaffir lime**. The leaves and flowers are used for flavoring recipes and in teas.

**Remember, all true limes turn yellow when fully ripe.**

**Those going to market are picked green**, so consumers don't confuse them with lemons on the produce shelf.

## Pummelos and Grapefruit



Grown for centuries in Asia and the Mediterranean, **pummelos** produce the largest fruit of any citrus.

In recent years, their popularity in California has grown dramatically. The main production variety is **Chandler**. It is a pink-fleshed variety that can grow to several pounds, nearly as large as a soccer ball! The flesh is sweet, but to eat it properly, it should be segmented from the rind.

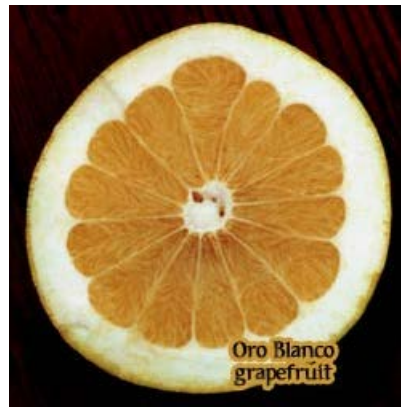
Other interesting pummelo varieties are **Reinking**, a large white-fleshed variety, and **Sarawak**, the **green Tahitian** or lime-like pummelo.

When it comes to grapefruit, the best in the West is **Oro Blanco**.

The University of California developed this white-fleshed pummelo-grapefruit hybrid. **Oro Blanco** has an exceptionally sweet flavor and lacks the typical bitter grapefruit aftertaste. It is seedless and ripens from December to April.

Another grapefruit to consider is **Cocktail**, a grapefruit-orange hybrid that produces a wonderful sweet juice. And if you insist on a red grapefruit, try **Star Ruby** or **Rio Red**, but remember, *the hotter the summer, the better the color and flavor*.

Obviously, the list doesn't stop here. Make a visit to your local retail nursery for these and other selections, including **citrons**, **tangelos**, **calamondins** and **kumquats**.



*Tom Spellman, a well-known Southern California nurseryman, is the Southwest sales manager for Dave Wilson Nursery and president of the [Citrus Label Society](#).*

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