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FR*ui*TROP

English edition

Close-up Citrus

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**Peruvian
grape**

**Showing
potential**



Citrus cultivation

Photos © Eric Imbert

The world's leading fruit crop grown between the latitudes 40° N and 40° S, citrus fruits were domesticated in Asia. Ancient texts refer to sour citrus fruits in India from 800 BC onwards, and mandarins, oranges and grapefruit in China at the time of Confucius. Trade and military conquests contributed strongly to the spread of citrus. This was first overland via Asia Minor and the Middle East as Roman and Greek influence spread (citron fruit, bitter orange) and then through Islam and the Crusades (sour citrus). The citron fruit was the first species grown in the Mediterranean several centuries before the Common Era. New citrus fruits

*such as sweet oranges were introduced around the Mediterranean basin in the sixteenth Century thanks to Portuguese navigators and the possibility of direct maritime trade with the Far East and China. These species were then disseminated in Africa and America. The first mandarins were introduced in the Mediterranean region much later. The fruit is mentioned at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century in Italy and not until 1850 in North Africa. However, the Mediterranean has been an important diversification zone for the three most important economic species—orange, mandarin and lemon. The grapefruit, *C. paradisi*, a natural hybrid of shaddock, is one of the few commercial citrus fruits to have originated in the Caribbean.*

Agronomy

The most suitable soils for growing citrus are slightly acidic and well-filtering. The choice of rootstock is one of the essential factors for success, giving tolerance or resistance to biotic (soil pests and diseases, degeneration diseases) and abiotic constraints (acidic or alkaline soils, salinity, reaction to cold or drought, etc.). It strongly influences factors such as vigour, the start of production and fruit yield and quality. The risk of contamination by tristeza has led to favouring *Poncirus* hybrids (Citrange, Citrumelo) as a replacement for sour orange. Disease-free plant material must be used. Today, new rootstocks are bred by hybridisation or the use of biotechnologies.

Certification plans have been set up in many countries. They combine the use of healthy plant material and prevention of possible recontamination by inoculum or a disease spread by an insect vector by siting outdoor nurseries in clean zones or by sheltered production in risk zones. The rootstocks are sown, replanted and then shield budded or chip budded, using a bud from a shoot of the desired variety.

It is recommended that the base of the trunk should be set in a slightly raised position at planting to limit attacks by *Phytophthora*. Tillage is reduced after planting so as not to damage the surface roots. The base of the trunk must be weeded. The maintenance technique used (permanent plant cover, chemical or mechanical weed control) depends on soil/climate and economic constraints.

Preliminary pruning is performed in the early years. Annual maintenance pruning then balances and aerates the foliage and ensures the renewal of fruit-bearing shoots. Irrigation is essential in dry areas and can be in the form of subfoliar sprinkling or trickle irrigation (soakers, drip, etc.). Fertilisation can be combined with irrigation in this case (fertigation) to save inputs and ensure steady mineral nutrition.

Mineral fertilisation must make up for losses via fruits and pruning and ensure the growth of the vegetative organs. Fertilisation includes nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. Trace elements are sprayed on the foliage. Fertilisation is based on the results of mineral analyses of leaves and soil.

Among growth regulators, gibberellic acid improves the setting of clementines and synthetic auxins increase fruit grade.



The influence of climatic conditions

Citruses originated in south-east Asia. The climate there is equatorial, tropical or subtropical according to the latitude and always strongly marked by a monsoon regime. The year features a hot, humid season (the monsoon season) and a fairly rain-free, often cooler season. The developmental cycle of citrus is keyed into these seasons. The hot, humid period is one of intense physiological activity, with shoot and fruit growth. Vegetative growth halts in the cool, dry period, a feature all the more marked when drought is severe or temperatures low. A marked halting of vegetative growth is essential before any flowering of certain citruses such as mandarin, orange, grapefruit and shaddock. Others with repeat-flowering such as citron, lemon and lime have less strict requirements but react to the same phenomena.

Temperatures between 21 and 30°C are optimum for physiological activity. This is strongly reduced when the temperature is lastingly and significantly higher than 35°C or lower than 13°C. Citrus growing is in fact limited by threshold and ceiling temperatures. Citrus trees are partially or totally destroyed at temperatures lower than 0°C. The extent of the damage depends firstly on frost duration and intensity and secondly on the susceptibility of plant parts and the type of citrus. Thus flowers, young leaves and fruits are more sensitive than branches and trunks. Citron, lime and lemon are more sensitive than mandarin, orange and grapefruit. Temperatures lower than -7°C are generally lethal for citrus trees. Temperatures higher than 50°C also cause damage.



Strong insolation is also better tolerated when the water supply is satisfactory. Irrigation must be used in citrus growing in arid or very dry regions. Plant water requirements are directly correlated with the climatic parameter total radiation (the main feature) related to insolation, temperature, wind, relative humidity, etc. These parameters are used in water requirement models and irrigation management tools.

Temperature plays an important role in the changes of fruit pigmentation as maturity approaches. Temperatures lower than 15°C cause the disappearance of chlorophyll pigments from the epidermis. This reveals carotenoid pigments. The synthesis of carotenoids (yellow and orange) and lycopene (red, specific to shaddock and grapefruit) is enhanced by a temperature of between 15 and 35°C. Red anthocyanin pigments (blood oranges) require lower temperatures but still higher than 12°C.

The synthesis and senescence of the various pigments are thus strongly affected by ambient temperature. In the tropics, the absence of low temperatures means that chlorophyll pigments do not disappear and the fruits remain green. Anthocyanin synthesis does not take place for the same reason and blood oranges remain blonde. In contrast, the red pigmentation of grapefruit is more intense. The alternate high daytime temperatures and cool nights in Mediterranean zones create an optimum environment for the breakdown of green chlorophyll pigments and the synthesis of the yellow, orange and red pigments of the various types of orange, mandarin and lemon. The external colour of the fruits is thus very well expressed.