

MEXICAN LIME



- Commercial citrus production in the Yuma area is devoted primarily to tangelo/tangerines, a distant second to desert lemons, the major citrus fruit grown in the area. Mexican limes, however, fit into a local niche market, with the small acreage grown essentially for local markets.
- Of the two acid, or sour, limes in world trade, the one longest known and most widely cultivated is the Mexican lime (*Citrus aurantifoli*), and many often refer the tangy fruit merely as "lime".
- The Mexican lime tree is exceptionally vigorous; may be shrubby and range from 6 1/2 to 13 feet high, with many slender, spreading branches, and usually with numerous, very sharp spines to 3/8 inch long. The lime fruits are borne singly or in 2's or 3's (or sometimes large clusters), at the twig tips. The pulp of the Mexican lime is greenish-yellow and the fruits are quite juicy, very acid and flavorful, with few or many small seeds which are also green in color.
- The Mexican lime, because of its special bouquet and unique flavor, is ideal for serving in half as a garnish and flavoring for fish and meats, for adding zest to cold drinks, and for making limeade. Commercially bottled lime juice is prized the world over for use in mixed alcoholic drinks.
- Limes are a very juicy citrus fruit. In fact, it is calculated that 2,200 lbs of fruit yields 1,058 pounds of juice.
- Mexican limes are often made into jam, jelly and marmalade. They are also pickled by first making 4 incisions at the top of the fruit and covering the fruits with salt, and later preserving them in vinegar. Before serving, the pickled fruits may be fried in coconut oil and sugar and then they are eaten as appetizers.
- Limes are somewhat ever bearing, but their crop comes mainly in the early fall here in Yuma.
- It is reported that Columbus supposedly obtained lime seeds (along with other fruit varieties) during a stop at the Canary Islands in 1493, his second voyage to America. There are two types of limes that grow well here in the low desert, the Mexican Lime (Key Lime or West Indian Lime) and the Persian Lime (Bearss Lime or Tahitian Lime).
- The Mexican Lime is very frost sensitive, and frost protection is usually a must. It produces small (~1"), seedy fruit with a thin green rind that turns yellow when mature. The fruit is produced nearly year-round and usually drops from the tree when yellow.
- The large, green, seedless limes found in many supermarkets is the Persian or Tahiti Lime (*Citrus latifolia*), not the Mexican lime. The Persian lime is larger than the Mexican Lime, more resistant to disease and pests, and has a thicker rind. They are picked slightly immature, while they are still green in color (they turn yellow when fully ripe, and might be confused with lemons). Lime growers generally replaced the Mexican Lime with Persian Lime trees because they are easier to grow, easier to pick because they have no thorns, and due to the much thicker skin, are easier and more economical to ship.
- Limes are small, somewhat larger than a walnut, oval in shape with a thin yellowish rind which are prone to splotchy brown spots. All limes have a higher sugar and citric acid content than lemons, and Key limes are more acidic than Persian.

- Although rarely eaten fresh out of hand like most other fruits, the lime is highly valued as an ingredient in many food and drink recipes. Most parts of the lime, including the zest (peel), pith (white layer between the peel and flesh), juice, leaves, and flesh, play important roles in a variety of dishes in many cultures.
- Limes favor tropical climates. It is thought that limes originally came from Southeast Asia, where Arab traders obtained them and returned them to Egypt and Africa in the 900s. The Moors introduced limes to Spain in the 1200s, and then the fruit was disseminated throughout Europe during the Crusades. Columbus brought limes to the Caribbean on his second voyage to the New World. They were subsequently cultivated in the desert southwest region by Spanish explorers. Today, the leading lime producers include the United States, India, Italy, Mexico, and Spain.
- If you are juicing the lime, bring it to room temperature first; a warmer lime will produce more juice. Then, applying moderate pressure with your hand, roll it on the counter prior to juicing; this will release even more juice. If you want to store the juice for future use, you can freeze it in ice cube trays, and keep them in zip-loc baggies for up to four months.
- One interesting bit of trivia is that the nickname “limey” originated from the 1800s, when British sailors were issued a daily ration of limes because the fruit’s high concentration of vitamin C prevented scurvy. (They didn’t actually know why or how it worked until 1923, when the health benefits of vitamin C were discovered.)
- In addition to their antioxidant-rich abundance of vitamin C, limes also contain cancer-fighting limonins.
- Lime juice is popular in many beverages, including nonalcoholic drinks such as limeade, as well as cocktails such as margaritas. Many commercial carbonated beverages feature lime as the predominant flavor. Limes are also a popular garnish, either as a twist (as in a gin and tonic) or as a wedge (often served as an accompaniment to Mexican beer).
- Like the juice of lemons, lime juice prevents oxidation and therefore can be sprinkled on fresh-cut fruit to prevent it from browning. Its chemical properties also make it a valuable addition to marinades. Lime juice serves as a wonderful salt substitute for people who are regulating their sodium intake and its piquancy enhances the flavor of many foods.
- Of the myriad lime recipes enjoyed around the globe, one of the most popular desserts is Key Lime Pie, which was developed after sweetened condensed milk was introduced to the United States in the 1850s.

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