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# Citrus Harvesting

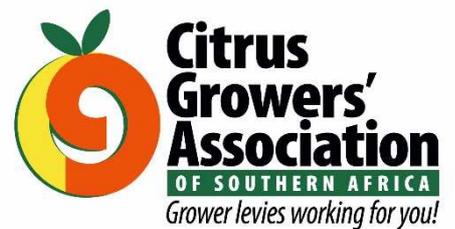
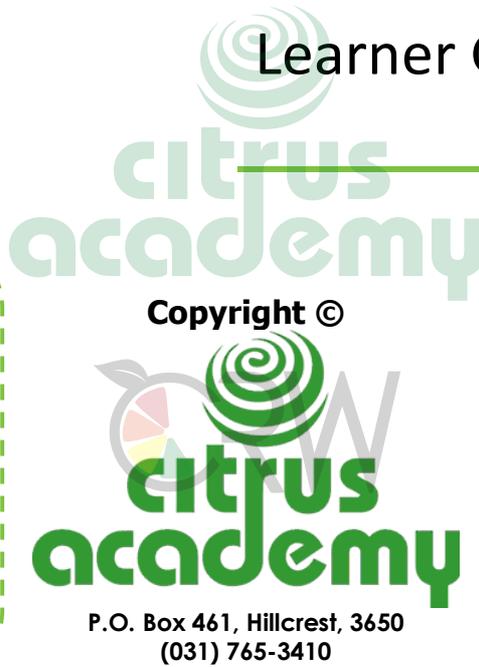
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## Module 2: Harvesting Practices

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### Learner Guide

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1<sup>st</sup> edition 2022

The content of this module is based on audio-visual material produced by the Citrus Academy.

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**Additional information sources:**  
Citrus Academy Production Learning Material  
CRI Citrus Production Guidelines

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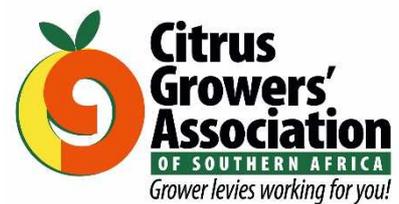
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## Introduction

Citrus fruit is generally picked for export from March to October, although picking can start as early as mid-January, depending on the type of citrus and the production region. On most citrus farms, seasonal workers are employed to pick fruit. It is very important that pickers know what to do and what not to do while picking export fruit.

While picking citrus, you must remember that you are working with fresh fruit that can be injured and damaged. The most injury and damage to citrus fruit happen during picking. Once fruit is injured or damaged, it cannot be exported and will have to be sold for less money, or if it rots, it cannot be sold at all and will instead cost money to remove. Remember that you are picking your wages off the tree.

## Picking Supervisor

While you are picking, there will be a supervisor or team leader for your picking team. This supervisor will tell you what sort of picking you will be doing and what you should be picking. Most of the time you will be picking fruit that will be exported using clippers. But sometimes you may be told to pick only fruit that has a certain colour or size, or that looks a certain way, and leave the rest of the fruit on the tree. You must listen carefully to these instructions, and follow them.

The other kind of picking is when the export fruit is already off the trees, and the fruit that is left is going to the juice factory. In that case, you may be told not to use clippers, but just to pick the fruit with your hand. This is called snap picking.

In this video, we will look at how export citrus fruit must be picked. You must follow all these steps very carefully to protect the fruit, and to make sure that the fruit arrives at the packhouse in a good condition.

## Personal Hygiene

Before you start picking, you need to make sure that your hands are clean and your nails are short, because long nails can injure the fruit. You should also not be handling the fruit if you have any open injuries or sores. They must be covered with a blue plaster before you begin.

## Picking Equipment

You will be issued with a pair of clippers that you will use to pick the fruit. Clippers are made of steel and the blades have rounded tips so that it will not injure the fruit. A spring keeps the clippers open, and the finger loop helps you to control the clippers while picking. The blades of the clippers should not overlap. If they do, they may tear the stem, and a long stem will damage other fruit. If your clippers do not work properly or are not sharp enough, report it to your supervisor immediately.

You will also receive a picking bag into which you place the fruit as you pick it. Some picking bags only have an opening at the top, while others open at the bottom with quick-release catches. The picking bag is always slung over the shoulder opposite to the hand holding the clippers. This means that if you are right-handed and have the clippers in your right hand, the bag should be over your left shoulder. Make sure that the bag does not have any holes or tears in it and that the strap is sturdy. If the bag is torn or ripped, repair it using thread.

Also check that the bag is clean, dry and completely empty before you start. Twigs or dirt in the bag will damage the fruit.

When picking tall trees, you will use a ladder to get to the fruit high up in the tree. Ladders can be made from aluminium or wood, and must be strong and sturdy. Ladders can have two or three legs. Check that your ladder does not have any splinters or loose metal pieces that can injure you, or damage the tree or the fruit.

You may be asked to wear gloves while picking, to protect the fruit from injury and to protect your hands, especially if you are picking thorny trees. Make sure that your gloves fit properly, and that they are clean and dry. You may also be issued with a pair of goggles to protect your eyes against twigs and small branches, and against dirt falling into your eyes when you are picking high up.

If you are issued with a set of overalls and gum boots, you are responsible for keeping them neat and clean.

## Picking Practices

Now we get to how the fruit must be picked. Hold the clippers in your dominant hand – the right hand for most people – and take the fruit in your other hand. Put the blades of the clipper on the fruit, and cut the stem as close as possible to the fruit without cutting or tearing the fruit itself. Only a short piece of stem must be left on the fruit. Cut the fruit stem at a right angle to the fruit. If you cut the stem skew it may leave a sharp point that can damage other fruit. Be careful not to damage the fruit with the tip of your clippers – this is the cause of most picking injuries.

Place the fruit in the bag. Don't throw or drop it in the bag, you will bruise the fruit. If the stem of the fruit is too long, clip it off before putting the fruit in the picking bag. Remember that any long stem will injure the other fruit in the bag.

If the tree is too tall to reach the fruit at the top, all the fruit that can be reached from the ground must first be picked before using a ladder, so that the ladder will not press against and injure fruit still on the tree. If you are using a ladder with two legs, lean it against the tree. Make sure that it is sturdy and secure before climbing it. If the ladder has three legs, the third leg is placed under the canopy of the tree to prop up the ladder, so that it does not have to lean against the tree. Be careful not to bump your picking bag against the ladder if the bag already has fruit in it.

When picking, make sure that you only put good quality fruit in your bag. If fruit is already injured, split, damaged or rotten on the tree, do not pick it. If fruit is lying on the ground or falls off the tree by itself, or if you drop any fruit on the ground, do not pick it up, ever. The fruit might look good now, but it will rot at the packhouse. Fruit that has dropped on the ground must stay there.

If you pick fruit with injuries, rot, mud, thorns or long stems and try to tip it into the bin, the supervisor may not count that bag and you will not get paid for it. For your own benefit, only pick fruit that is healthy and whole.

Fruit that hangs low on the tree can be picked, but make sure first from your supervisor whether this is allowed. Fruit that touches the ground must never be picked nor placed with other export fruit.

Once your picking bag is full, take it to the picking trailer or bin to tip it. Never run with a picking bag that has fruit in it. This will make the fruit bounce against each other, and cause injuries.

If your bag only opens at the top, take the bag off your shoulder, lay it down on the fruit in the bin and lift the bag to let the fruit roll out. If your bag opens at the bottom, keep the bag over your shoulder, rest it on the fruit in the bin, release the catches and lift the bag away, allowing the fruit to roll out the bottom. Do not throw the fruit into the bin or drop it onto other fruit, because this will bruise the fruit. Once all the fruit is out of the bag, shake out all the leaves and stems that may still be in the bag before putting fruit into it again.

## *At the End of the Day*

After you finish picking for the day, hand your equipment back to the supervisor, who will lock it away safely, ready for the next day. The supervisor will instruct you on how and when to clean and sanitise the equipment.

