

Chris Duggan: Desert Treasures Citrus & Date Groves, Tucson, AZ

A spring breeze in Tucson carries the fragrant scent of orange blossoms, lifted from intermittent citrus trees that freckle our backyards and sidewalks. Neighbors leave a surplus of lemons and grapefruits on each others' doorsteps, in an effort to avoid the eventual loss of fallen fruits. In the same way, Chris Duggan of Desert Treasures Citrus & Date Groves, owing to an overabundance of sweet grapefruit, showed up at the Oro Valley Farmers' Market in the summer of 2006 with 10 boxes of off-season white grapefruit.

Let's backtrack- in the early 1930's Reverend George Furgeson, Rector of Saint Philip's In the Hills, nestled his home into a cooler region about five miles north of Tucson's early city limits. He planted twenty-five acres of citrus and date groves. Though the property changed hands several times in the 40's, 50's and 60's, the grove was preserved and offered residents and visitors day trips and excursions where citrus bounty could be purchased in the gift shop. In the 1960's the esteemed property was subdivided and sold, and the gift shop closed.

Peter Larsen, the current owner, bought the main house in 1971 and has maintained his 8-acre 300-tree grove since then and now produces about 1,000 cases a year. His delicious citrus is sold locally to the Food Conspiracy on 4th Avenue and New Life Health Stores. Chris Duggan, Larsen's son-in-law, expands their citrus market to the local Tucson Farmers' Markets because "it is a good fit, and people really do appreciate having premium quality local citrus." His product line is expansive, and we look forward to navel oranges, lemons, kumquats, Minneola tangelos and easy-to-peel Dancy mandarins as they ripen beginning in mid-December. Next typically available in mid-to-late January are other varieties of oranges including Trovitas, Marrs, Arizona Sweets, and Valencias, as well as Kinnow mandarins and all varieties of grapefruit: Ruby Red, Pink, Cocktail, and White. The white grapefruit sustains the Groves through the summer as they get sweeter and sweeter. The Grove's remaining 15 mature date palms provide fresh Hayani and Halawi dates from late July to October.

Desert Treasures Citrus & Date Groves is appropriately located on Orange Grove Road. All citrus is pesticide free, organic fertilizer is used, and trees are irrigated with well water. Desert Treasures Citrus & Date Groves invites you to taste the unique and diverse citrus flavors that one of Tucson's only remaining groves has to offer.