

# **MANDARINS: PIXIE**

**FRUIT DESCRIPTION:** Seedless. Oblate to Obovoid shape with small neck and collar. 1.75 to 2.50 inches in diameter equates to a Small to Large size designation. Fruit shape variable. Rind has a pale orange to yellowish-orange color, slightly pebbled texture and a medium-thin thickness. Peels easily without dripping juice and albedo adhering to the segments. The segments separate easily and the core is hollow at early maturity. The medium-orange colored flesh is finely textured, moderately juicy and has a flavor that is sweet, mild and low in acid. Because of the low sugar and acid content, the favor tends to become somewhat insipid after it passes peak maturity.

**TREE DESCRIPTION:** Vigorous erect growth habit of open and spreading branches. Medium to large tree height with dark green foliage and branches that have few, small thorns. Much of the fruit is positioned inside the tree, providing protection from freezing temperatures and sunburn. Fruit holds well on the tree and can remain firm until summer, but some juice loss and slight rind puffing may occur late in the season. Tendency to alternate bear an abundant amount of small, irregular shaped fruit may be alleviated with management techniques, scheduled harvesting and annual pruning. Fruit thinning may help to increase size.

**HARVEST SEASON:** Late December to May.

**PROS:** Seedless fruit is easy to peel and section and has a pleasant, low-acid flavor. The mid to late maturing fruit holds exceptionally well on the tree, with just a slight loss of flavor and juiciness, only occurring very late in the season. Pixie has become quite successful in the specialty markets, due in large part to the promotion and marketing development by the Ojai Valley Pixie Growers Association. Seedless when grown in mixed plantings.

**CONS:** Moderate to severe alternate bearing tendencies may be alleviated with management techniques, scheduled harvesting and annual pruning. Small fruit size, poor rind color and variable external appearance have hindered its commercial appeal in the past. Fruit shape and rind texture varies throughout the citrus regions. Full exterior color is slow to develop in some climates. Not recommended for the hot desert climates of California and Arizona, where fruit set may be light and the flesh may be dry. Fruit must remain on the tree throughout the coldest months of the year and is subject to frost damage.

**COMPATABLE ROOTSTOCKS:** Carrizo, C-35 Citrange, Citrumelos, Trifoliates

**RECOMMENDED SPACINGS:**

Traditional: 8' to 14' x 18', 8' to 14' x 20'

Double Planting Standard Rootstock: 6' or 7' x 18', 6' or 7' x 20'

C-35: 8' to 14' x 14' to 20'

Double Planting C-35 Citrange: 5' to 7' x 14' to 20'

**HISTORY:** Pixie Mandarin was developed at the University of California Citrus Research Center from seed obtained by Howard B. Frost in 1927. The second-generation hybrid seed was the result of open-pollination of Kincy Mandarin, which is a cross between King Mandarin and Dancy Mandarin. Many years later, colleagues James W. Cameron and Robert K. Soost made seedling selections and these trees were evaluated at U.C. Riverside. From these selections, Pixie was chosen for its commercial potential and released to the industry in 1965. Because of its small fruit size, pale rind color and variable external appearance, it never caught on as a popular mandarin variety, even though it was seedless and late maturing. It wasn't until the Ojai Valley Pixie Growers Association was founded in the early 1980's, that Pixie Mandarin began to develop the commercial success that it enjoys today. The organization was formed to handle and market the increasing quantities of fruit, which have to compete with late navel and Valencia oranges from mid-March into the summer months. Pixie's popularity began in the local farmers markets of California. Now it can also be found in upscale markets throughout the United States.

**OTHER OBSERVATIONS:** Climatic effects on the fruit quality, such as rind color and maturity, are different from region to region and some areas are more favorable and produce fruit with better size and rind color. The Ojai Valley is one of these areas and the hillsides there seem to be ideal for growing Pixies. No one knows why it performs so well there. It may be the soil, the climate, the coastal influence or all of the above. Pixie also performs well in inland valleys, but really seems best suited to the intermediate regions near the coast. The harvest period varies greatly and is determined by the region in which it is grown. Generally, picking begins in mid-December and finishes sometime in May. In the cooler climates, harvest sometimes lasts into June and July. Most Pixies are picked fresh prior to shipping, providing the consumer with quality, tree ripened fruit. There is no foreign competition in the Pixie market, but there is a foreign threat in the form of exotic insects, such as Fruit Flies and Glassy-Winged Sharpshooter.