



# Full of Fruit

By **Fiona Sullivan**

It was down the back. Below the last of the decks, the verandahs leading down into the garden, edging on the wild. A series of trees one could hardly make shape of for they were strangled and blown out in the middle with couch grass. Sh.. grass as I fondly named it. The naming took place over the weeks, the part time fortnights, when I got a chance to work down there but gradually it came clean. Pulling the strands of grass out, separating, snipping, tugging. What emerged was a series of thirty citrus trees which I thought were maybe lemon, perhaps orange or mandarin, even grapefruit, some big, some small. Some scrawny, some fat and three with very odd leaves.

Following the permaculture principles expounded by Bill Mollison, I cut the couch at ground level and most of it did not come back. Then mulched with sawdust from a local furniture maker who works with untreated native timber. Then pruned! Pruning can be done any time of year with citrus which is truly marvelous. Whenever it's all a bit much and you need a victim you can sympathise with, your citrus is there for you, especially if you've got thirty.

Cut out the middle and all the branches which tangle over each other and grab the light but especially the middle so the sun and rain can get in. Cut off anything that comes out low and straight and up itself and grabbing of energy; it won't give you any fruit, it's an upstart. Cut off branches with spikes. They show a plant with stress so cut off anything that's stressing, including as much of the thorny branches as you can and keep an eye on the height and the shape. Now shape is about preference and number of trees, layout of orchard. You can stick to the traditional or go straight for ikebana. The height is all about access.



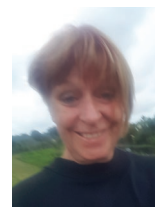
So I fed the yellow ones and mulched and maintained cause a girl's gotta do something and look after what needs it and zilch, no fruit. The first year. Then the second year the boss announced that they

are all limes with three kaffir (makrut). They settled down and were fat and green with quite a bit of fruit and tiny ones too and blossoms at the same time so I think hummm, and set off to sell them in Tauranga. Well, more set up a market and a supply chain where, if the limes are still coming off the trees, they are going into peoples' drinks in town. Hate waste. Not so much for the money, am selling them cheap, but more so that the work put in is not wasted and for the fun of it; love retail. The reality of this situation is that the Coromandel limes are for sale in Tauranga while Tauranga is awash with citrus. A lot of bar owners have their own trees and unless our season is long... But still, they're selling.

So the Kiwifruit picking season is closing and late orchards, like my friend's one which is organic, are getting the pickers in. The orchardists have to clean the ground of fruit before the pickers come in. Old fruit can contaminate the new and parts of the harvest could blow, pests could spread, fruit get bruised. Hence I ended up with two washing baskets full of fruit. Now, when I first started writing for Seasons I did a bit of a rave about bottling and I know Kinsa has too and you can't beat it. People say, "Oh I freeze it, it's so quick and easy," but the power goes down and then what are you left with? Compost. And all that time the fruit is frozen you are using electricity which is blowing out its value re carbon footprint. So bottle. It's done once and it's permanent. And use recycled jars to double gain your eco points and then you're not paying any brand for your food either.

The jar lids must be perfect, no dents or rust, and the best thing is to put them through the dishwasher. At the hottest of the cycle, when they start drying, you may be able to nick a couple of jars out and successfully fill 'em but best is to have the jars in the oven and pour boiling water on the lids in a pot or Pyrex to heat them. It's all about the fruit being cooked perfectly when it goes into the jars, and everything being hot enough and no air bubbles and the lids going on smoothly, properly, snug. Overflow method, it's called. Good luck. But it's fun and a challenge and, when successful, unbelievably delicious out of season. Don't use sugar, it's so bad for so many and fruit is wonderful served with honey.

Kiwifruit, or Chinese Gooseberries, as we used to call them in the days of my youth, must be the hardest to bottle. You'd think it would keep its shape and look rather elegant in the jars but no, let it simmer three minutes too long and it goes to mush just like peaches and plums do. I think the problem is that they are composed of so much water the lids don't suck down easily. That's how you tell a successful bottle, the lid is sucked right down in the middle, a nice concave. To open it, later in the year or a few years later, stick the sharp point of a knife under the side of the lid and break the suction.



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