



Desert Discoveries, Part 2: What Grows on Trees

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I've picked apples, and actually possess my own orchard consisting of two extra dwarf apple trees (we recently expanded by planting three more) that yielded an entire grocery store bag of petite apples last fall. Impressive, huh?

My point is, farmers know where real foods in their natural states – apples, broccoli, eggs – originate.

Despite this, I'm standing in my parent's sunny backyard outside of Tucson, Arizona, goggling at gorgeous bright yellow fruits hanging from a small, shiny-leaved tree as if I've never seen them before.

Get this – lemons actually grow on trees!

OK, I knew that. But we don't do citrus in clammy, cloudy western Washington, nor on the cold-wintered east side, so forgive me if finding spring lemons on a tree feels like a delightful new discovery.

Cherie's husband, Brett, picks a lemon from a tree in her parent's backyard in Arizona.

My folks, lucky them, also have a lime tree and a grapefruit tree, now covered in creamy white blossoms. The flowers, abuzz with honey bees, emit a heavenly sweet fragrance I'd love to trap in a bottle and take home as a souvenir.

I pluck a smooth lemon and cut it into juicy wedges to share with my husband. I think we both expect this lemon to taste extraordinary and it does – fresh, yes, and extraordinarily sour!

The next day I discover something else as we walk the neighborhood. Too many people let their fruit go un-harvested here, just like at home, where each fall I mourn the countless apples left to rot around our rural area.

Grapefruits and oranges molder on trees and drop to the ground; a fresh, free, nutritious harvest gone to waste. I'm aghast, thinking of starving children in Africa, the price of citrus at home, the vanishing water fed to those fruiting trees in this desert environment. Worse, I know I've been guilty of wasting good food myself.

Why does our culture care so little about something so important to life?

When friends of my parents, snowbirds flying north again, kindly offer to let us pick from their prolific backyard orchard, we leap at the chance. We're greeted by delicious grapefruit the size of softballs, glowing lemons and oranges.

Growing on trees. Can you believe that?

Happy Earth Day! (Hey, how about planting a tree to celebrate?)

~ Cherie

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