



Stephen &amp; Kristin Pategas

## in the garden by Stephen and Kristin Pategas

# Oh Citrus, Where Art Thou?

During most of the 1900s, a tourist or resident would be hard put to drive along any portion of Orange Blossom Trail during the winter and not catch the heavenly scent from citrus trees in flower. Built in 1956, the 22 - story Citrus Tower in Clermont overlooked tens of thousands of trees. When we arrived in Orlando in 1982, citrus trees clothed the hillsides along the Florida Turnpike from Orlando to Okauchumpka.

Citrus trees were also in almost every backyard and neighbors eagerly shared their bounty. Every breakfast included fresh grapefruit and citrus worked its way into many meals and beverages. The prime juicing orange, Parson's Brown oranges that we received by the bagful from neighbors were more than our tender wrists could handle. We quickly bought the appliance everyone else had - an electric juicer.

We were transported back to those glory days of citrus when during a

Friends of Casa Feliz bus trip to Winter Garden we visited the Heritage Museum inside the 1918 Atlantic Coast Line Depot. One set of displays highlights how citrus was harvested and how important the citrus industry was to Winter Garden for decades. Oranges and grapefruits are cheery fruits and they created many fortunes. In contrast, the reproduced articles hanging on the museum walls note the devastation to the trees caused by major freezes in the 1800s and still fresh in our memories - the ones in 1983, 1985, and 1989. They are grim reading and portend lost fortunes and a challenging future for anyone involved with citrus.

While the freezes of the 1980s taught us which landscape plants were susceptible to a harsh winter, they also caused a severe decline in the citrus industry in Central Florida. Citrus growers moved farther south to hopefully warmer winter temperatures and the vacant groves soon sprouted houses. Today, the Citrus Tower affords a commanding view of asphalt shingled roofs and nary an orange tree.

However, it is the diseases that now spell the death knell for the industry and

most backyard citrus. In a future article we'll explore the current status of disease issues and the best procedures for homeowners to use for growing citrus under these trying conditions. In our garden, the mature citrus trees planted by an earlier generation were damaged by the freezes and are now gone. But we continue to harvest limes from the tree we planted in 2007. During the winter there are enough blossoms to create a pleasant and wistful distraction when their scent reaches the nose.



Top: A postcard mailed from Daytona Beach in 1923. Middle photo: "Girls" on the packing row earned up to \$7.00 a day. At right: Local orange crate labels. At left: Harvesting equipment on display. All photos by Stephen G. Pategas/Hortus Oasis.

