

An introduction to macadamia varieties and harvesting.

When we became involved with Macadamias in the early nineties all the varieties we came across were what are now called “stick tights” or “pickers”, and the nuts were picked from the trees.

We were told that some growers had “droppers”, where the nuts were allowed to fall to the ground to be picked up later. But we never actually visited a “dropper” orchard before we made the decision to go with “pickers”.

Some orchardists with “pickers” used classical fruit picking bags.

Some orchardists with “pickers” would spread tarpaulins on the ground under the tree then handpick the nuts and drop them onto the tarpaulin . They considered this a more efficient way to harvest their nuts than using fruit picking bags. BUT those nuts never touched the ground and they were “pickers”, not “droppers”, as you will read below.

In fact all macadamias are “droppers” because all of them will drop their ripened nuts..., in time. A “picker” variety is one in which the ripened nuts tend to stay on the tree long enough to permit the tree to be picked as a single mature crop.

We were told in the nineties that the major commercial orchards in Hawaii and Australia had “droppers”. We were told that the varieties selected for New Zealand were chosen because the ripe nuts remained on the tree long enough (before dropping) for it to be practical to pick the whole tree as one ripe crop. We were also told that macadamias that dropped onto wet New Zealand soil would rapidly become victim to fungi that would spoil the taste. With increasing frequency over the years orchards have been planted with “droppers”, which drop onto the ground, and it is generally accepted that they are not troubled by fungi.

At the present time most of the older established orchards are “pickers” and most of the newly established orchards are “droppers”. But you need to put a lot of thought into which harvesting approach is best suited to your land, and your personality.

Our orchard consists of “pickers” and our very steep terrain would make “droppers” impossible. On some orchards people use ladders, or mechanical ‘cherry pickers’. Our orchard is too steep for even the shortest ladder so we prune the trees to a level that can be picked from the ground.

With flatter orchards you have the option of planting “droppers”. Nuts are collected from the ground by a variety of devices, hand operated or machine operated.

With the new varieties of “droppers” you are dealing with recently developed varieties bred to give the advantages of more nuts per tree, larger nuts, and

reliable crops. Droppers do not need to be pruned, if you intend to harvest them from the ground.

Orchardists with 'Pickers' already have a series of tests to judge when the crop is ready to be picked, and those same maturity tests can be applied to a "dropper" if you choose to pick it by hand. Maturity tests are covered in the website under Frequently Asked Questions.

Every successful cropping industry has an eye to change and improvement, and macadamias are no different. Orchardists with older varieties, for example, could top graft existing trees with newer varieties to take advantage of scientific advances. That holds true whether the orchardist intends to harvest as droppers or pickers.

There are successful growers who pick their nuts directly from the tree, there are successful growers who harvest their nuts from the ground. The current situation certainly enables species of nut to be matched more advantageously to orchard terrain than in the past.

In theory macadamias have everything in their favour. They taste good and they're good for you. But it's a developing industry and if you intend to grow commercially you need a fully worked out business plan of the pros and cons. If it's your ambition to "get rich quick" macadamias are not for you.

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