

When life hands you lemons...

Hoen's Greenhouse tree develops loyal following

by Rick Claypool

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It's winter in Toledo, and all the trees have shed their autumn foliage. All, that is, except for Hoen's Greenhouse and Garden Center's "famous lemon tree."



Teresa Hoen plucks a lemon from the famous tree

Why all the fuss about these lemons? The Hoens' tree produces Meyer lemons, a distinctly juicy and sweet variety of lemon with especially thin skin, and the fruit are unlike anything found in major retailers.

Co-owner Teresa Hoen says some customers buy 40-60 at a time to use in gourmet pies, teas and — of course — lemonade. "We've even had people from Florida pick them up to take back to their home state!" she says.

Owner Bob Hoen's grandfather, Frank Hoen, brought the tree to Ohio from Florida in 1970. Obviously, lemon trees do not naturally grow in this cold climate, but greenhouse conditions keep the tree, which weighs 6,000 pounds. at its base, healthy and blooming.

"When the adjoining family orchard was sold in 2002, we moved the tree to its current location," says Heather Hoen, the family business' marketing representative. "The base weighed 6,000 pounds. To get it into the greenhouse, some of the building had to be removed and a huge crane put it in its place."

Buds form on the lemon tree in February. Small lemons form after the fragrant springtime blossoms fall, and they finally become yellow and ripe in late fall. During the last few years, the tree produced more than 1,200 lemons annually.

According to Bob Hoen, the lemons, which sell for 65 cents apiece, are in their prime between mid-December and Jan-uary, after which the tree will be pruned to prepare for next year.

There's more than lemons to the Hoen family's business, too. Its Christmas gift shop features ornaments, candles, crafts and baked goods, and the green house is overflowing with lush poinsettias.

Additionally, Teresa Hoen is an ambassador for the Maumee Valley Growers (www.maumeevalleygrowers.com), a collective of regional farmers and green-houses devoted to aiding the local economy by promoting the fruits (pun intended) of Northwest Ohio's growers.

Hoen's Greenhouse and Garden Center is open Monday-Saturday, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Located 1710 Perrysburg-Holland Rd. in Holland, just off of Airport Highway.

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www.hoensgreenhouse.com