

Floyd Dillon Had a Dream

While living in Carmel, California during World War II, Floyd Dillon saw thousands of U S Soldiers training at Fort Ord near Monterey. He predicted they'd yearn to come back to California after the war. They would want homes and gardens. There would be so many people seeking this promised land that California would become crowded. Lots, yards, gardens, plants and homes would need to be small. The near perfect plant for those gardens should shout Sunshine and California! It would be a good-looking shrub with small form, lush foliage, sweet fragrance, attractive flowers, and flavorful fruit during all four seasons.

Voila! A Citrus, but not just any Citrus, a Dwarf Citrus tree. There should also be a broad selection of Oranges, Tangerines, Lemons, Limes, Grapefruit, and Kumquats. In this way home gardeners would have the opportunity to make the same kind of individual choices that a woman has in choosing her outfits. Floyd had already managed a successful thirty year career merchandising women's clothing, and he understood the power of providing choice and selection.

The Dwarf Citrus tree was a great idea that had not yet been realized. Seeing a need to be filled, Floyd sought the advice of orchardists, researchers, and professors at UC Riverside Citrus Research Station to learn why not. Most experts thought this was a silly idea. They were trying to develop "strong, vigorous, healthy" trees, not "stunted", "runty" and "dwarfy" ones! However, his attention was drawn to some trees with combinations of scions and rootstocks that produced just the dwarfing characteristics he had in mind. He found what he was looking for: small-scale versions of standard citrus, with normal size leaves and fruit. This discovery marks the birth of Four Winds Growers. Experiments to perfect the Dwarf Citrus first began in Floyd's back yard in Carmel. Then, some years later, trees were field grown in Ventura County.

In the early fifties, "Quick Decline Tristeza Virus" hit the Citrus Industry in Southern California, regulators enforcing ever widening quarantine areas. Floyd didn't give up his dream. He set out looking for a place to grow trees in Northern California. Looking for affordable land with warm winter temperatures and plenty of good quality water, he found the ideal situation; an isolated microclimate in Alameda County. In 1954, he packed up his "mother" plants, his wife Mildred, and moved to Palm Avenue in Mission San Jose, soon to become part of a new City, Fremont.

Floyd's son, Don Dillon Sr. followed him, with wife Mary Ann and three kids in tow. Don Sr. grew Four Winds for over 50 years. In addition to running the business, he served as a City Councilman and Mayor of Fremont from 1962 to 1978. President of the International Plant Propagators Society in 1982, he also became California's "Nurseryman of the Year" in 1987.

Floyd's grandson Don Dillon Jr., is a Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo graduate. He was named California's "Young Nurseryman of The Year" 1989, and President of the California Association of Nurseries and Garden Centers in 1999. Don Jr. now oversees the Fremont operation with the able assistance of Mike Andrade who joined Four Winds after a stint in the Navy.

Granddaughter Mary Helen Seeger and husband John "Cedar" Seeger manage the Winters growing grounds. John served as President of the Superior Chapter of the California Association of Nurseries and Garden Centers in 1997 and 1998. Mary Helen was President of the California Citrus Nursery Society from 1997 to 2002. Great Grandson, Aaron Dillon joined the team most recently and is heading up development of the newest facility in Watsonville, and currently serves as President of the California Citrus Nursery Society.

In a nutshell, that is the history of Four Winds Growers, now in its fourth generation as a family owned and operated nursery, now featuring a wide range of edible ornamentals. Our trees are sold in California nurseries and are also shipped nationwide to enthusiastic gardeners in nearly all states. (Agricultural restrictions prevent shipping to TX, FL and AZ).

Gardeners across the nation now share in the dream, enjoying the fruit of Floyd Dillon's vision: a Dwarf Citrus tree with small form, lush foliage, sweet fragrance, attractive flowers, and flavorful fruit.