

*The
Citrus
Brigade*

The War Of Citrus
Fighting fruit disease

Natty Mark Samuels

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Dedication

to Susie Cogan, Jen Pewsey, Anna Dominey
and Russell Bailey
of
Daily Info

to John Green aka Baps
of
Barracks Lane Community Gardens

and to Gwladys Noirault
of
Northway Community Centre

for their support of the first
Oxford Citrus Festival

In a back garden, a boy cries; in a nearby orchard, a farmer cries also: their orange trees are dying.

Through the cascade, the thirteen year old smiles, when he thinks of the countless hours spent making marmalade with his beloved grandma. Each making was a two day adventure of sweet interaction with sour orange. And then he weeps a little more, at the thought of not being able to pick a fruit for his breakfast blessing, or the picking for the making of a fruit punch, when friends or family step in. The boy lays under his favourite tree of shade, wrapped in aroma's fading embrace, contemplating citrus.

In his bittersweet reflection, he comes to the decision that he must do something: he decides to become a soldier. Not the normal combatant of military zones, but a soldier for the protection of citrus.

So he began to join botanical associations and commenced engagement with research opportunities on the net. If he is to defend his little friends against their omnipresent enemies, he must gather as much evidence as possible about the nemesis. He must be battle-ready, intelligence updated and strategies intact. This is the War of Citrus and he and his friends - and other concerned peers - are the 1st Battalion of the Citrus Brigade....

Come, Brown Citrus Aphid,
For you shall no longer conquer here.
You're a herald of destruction:
We are constructors of a snare.

1st Voice

I shall come with water,
Knocking those insects off a leaf.
I've a good friend called hose,
Come to give the citrus relief.

2nd Voice

My preferred weapon of choice,
Will be insecticidal soap.
Coming to the rescue,
At the contagious lack of hope.

3rd Voice

I will chop tomato leaves,
Main ingredient for a spray.
Alkaloids and I,
So citrus lives another day.

4th Voice

I'll plant fennel and dill,
To attract the predators.
Those who prey on the aphids,
Are my fellow warriors.

And out they go, volunteer monitors throughout the orchards; with clipboards and pens, magnifying glasses and knives: wearing their lemon yellow badges of identity. They choose the data trees, going back to them regularly, documenting progress and problems.

They've received some funding from a conservation project and the local council; recipients of awards from a youth organisation and from a botanical conference: their badge has become, an emblem of activism and pride.

1st Voice

I will bring lacewing,
A parasitic buddy.
He will feed on aphids:
My friend will be very happy.

2nd Voice

Because it contains sulphur,
I'll make a spray from garlic.
All part of the arsenal,
When time to be strategic.

3rd Voice

Because they breed so quickly,
I'll bring the damsel bug.
My number one companion:
To the aphid she's a common thug.

4th Voice

As with citrus greening.
There's the parasitic wasps.
In this scenario of war,
Those buzzing things are tops.

Warriors of the Yellow Badge, fighters of infestation. They fight against the curling and the wilting and the retarding of growth. They counteract all the infiltrators: those intent on plant espionage. The Citrus Brigade are relentless in their campaigning, in whatever theatre of war they happen to be in; a back garden, grove or a farm, in whichever country they happen to be.

1st Voice

Citrus Canker
And those yellow lesions

2nd Voice

One called Melanose
Fungal infection

Voices

We fight so all can use citrus

3rd Voice

Sooty Mold
From insect secretion

4th Voice

Greasy spot
Yellow blistering

Voices

We fight so all can use citrus

As well as the diseases, five years on, the crying boy, now known as "Vita" - from vitamin - has made sure that each battalion member knows of the vectors, as well as what they carry or cause. Sad to think that a family – the *Rutaceae* - who do so much for the world, should be persecuted so: should suffer continual invasion. If not the frost, flooding or harsh winds, there's the constant visitation from the parasitic ones.

As soon as one has been forced to retreat, another member of the enemy force goes on the offensive, so the Citrus Brigades have become battle-hardened.

1st Voice

Orange Dog Caterpillar,
Laying eggs on a leaf.
Eating the edges,
In various stages:
Don't let the tree wear a wreath.

2nd Voice

The Citrus Red Mite,
One of the tiniest of pests.
In the hot and the dry,
It will try to crucify:
Sole intention is to infest.

3rd Voice

Watch out for Citrus Thrip,
The streak and the scab.
Bullies the younger,
In the driest of weather:
Still he boasts and he blabs.

4th Voice

Citrus Whitefly,
Another sucker of sap.
Watch out for residue,
From all that honeydew:
When disease seems like its on tap.

Even though they are outnumbered, the Citrus Brigades will not give up. They are alert, ever ready, for the armies of scales and snails. Like the firefighters prepared for inferno, the citrus soldier knows that vigilance is key. Wherever they go, they fly the regimental flag; a tricolour of orange, yellow and green: the colours of citrus. As well as their national flags, many people began to fly the Citrus flag also, from the windows in their homes.

People started calling the Citrus Brigade, "The Citrusans," because they believe in citrus. And in his teaching of citrus, Vita makes sure that his fellow combatants and the general public, are aware of the destroyers of goodness: that it is the tiniest of things, that wreak the most havoc.

And Vita, sitting in an orange grove, thinks back to the day five years ago, when he cried himself to decision – and took the Citrus Oath: to always defend them. And he still finds the time – less so these days – to make marmalade with beloved grandma. Now she has arthritis, he does most of the tasks: with experimentation. Whereas it was always of orange, Vita has made one of orange, lemon and lime; another of grapefruit; one of orange and kumquat and so on. They still laugh, enjoying the presence of each other. And his breakfast blessing is now a lemon or lime water drink: the everyday ritual on rising.

Vita doesn't want to see another boy crying in some other back garden, or another farmer, quietly weeping in the furthest part of a lemon orchard. This is the War of Citrus: and he's a member of the Citrus Brigade.

Sources

The Spruce

Tree Help.com