

High-Headed Nursery Trees

What are high-headed trees and why should nurseries produce them and growers plant them? High-headed trees have a longer than normal (16 inch) trunk that has the scaffold branching begin at about 24 inches. These trees are suited to accommodate mechanical harvesting shakers and fruit catch frames but have other horticultural and practical use in the grove.

Why should growers want and plant high-headed trees? In addition to preparing for the future of mechanical harvesting and improving the recovery of fruit, there are **many horticultural advantages to high-headed trees:**

- Herbicide application is more uniform and there is less injury to low canopy tree foliage
- Herbicide booms don't contact low hanging foliage, and this reduces the chance for spread of canker
- Micro sprayer Irrigation pattern is not affected by low hanging branches, and water distribution is more uniform
- Irrigation micro sprayers are more visible for checking proper operation and maintenance
- Less exposure to brown rot and greasy spot with air drainage under the canopy
- Reduce severity and frequency for mechanical skirting
- Fruit production should start sooner after planting since an older tree is planted

This is not to suggest that high-headed trees won't require some change in attitude and adjustment in cultural practices. The following are some issues that production managers, who always have been innovative, will have to resolve:

- Need a rigid nursery tree to withstand wind, mechanical, and pest pressure
- Taller tree wrap and may need longer stakes if stake is needed
- Taller wraps will house insects that attract predators that can pull over and break the tree

In conclusion, to have a sustainable Florida citrus industry in the presence of canker and greening, and possible new immigration rules we must become more efficient. Mechanical harvesting offers the potential efficiency we need and high-headed trees are where we start. Regardless of the shaking method, we still need to catch the fruit under the tree before it contacts the ground to avoid the issues of product safety.

