

Citrus Trees

Planting & Growing Guide

Introduction Evergreen plants with bright green foliage and fragrant flowers. Valuable as ornamentals or orchard trees. Excellent source of Vitamin C. Citrus are not difficult to grow but do have certain requirements that need to be met. Citrus are affected by cold and accumulated heat. Taking advantage of microclimates around your house may aid you in growing these cold-sensitive fruits. The following lists citrus in order of most tender to most hardy: lime, lemon, grapefruit, 'Bears' lime, sweet orange, most mandarins, Meyer Lemon, Satsuma mandarin, kumquat. The tenderest foliage can be damaged at temperatures of 32°F, while the most hardy citrus can stand temperatures down to 18°F, but most fruit will be damaged at 26-28°F. If damaged by a frost, most citrus will still produce fruit the following year. Citrus also need a certain level of accumulated heat in order to ripen. Since lemons are eaten for their acidic taste, they don't need the accumulated heat in order to sweeten up and are therefore suited for cool, coastal climates. Grapefruit and oranges need a high-accumulated heat and only reach peak quality in hot inland and desert areas. Most citrus are self-fruitful.

Planting Instructions Fruit trees are a lifetime investment and caring for them properly, right from the start, will insure years of enjoyment and productivity. The greater the investment in early care, the less maintenance that will be required as the tree matures. Dig a hole twice the width of the root ball. Place the tree in the hole so the root crown, where the roots meet the trunk, is high. Add the fill soil (mixed with high quality soil conditioner or organic matter) back in and water thoroughly. Citrus must have well-drained soil, as they are sensitive to waterlogged soils. However, they need adequate moisture. If planting in containers, use a pot that is at least 1.5 ft in diameter. A soil analysis is also recommended to determine any soil deficiencies, but this can be delayed until the tree has begun to establish itself. A gradual application of proper soil amendments will suffice if proper sunlight and drainage are available from the start.

Fertility For mineral soils that are well-balanced, a yearly application of compost and an organic fertilizer high in nitrogen is ideal. It should be applied in early spring, mixed into the top 6" of the soil in a broad ring underneath the drip line of the tree.

In the long-term, calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, and potassium, along with sufficient nitrogen, will significantly enhance tree health and fruit quality.

Citrus also benefit from application of micronutrients such as zinc, iron, manganese and magnesium, if these are at low-levels in your soils. Container grown citrus might need more frequent applications of nitrogen since watering may leach nitrogen. Periodic soil testing will show whether pH and nutrient needs are being met.

Frost Protection To avoid damage by frost, protect trees with row covers or frost blankets. See our Main Catalog or website for details. If trees are planted in containers, move them inside or to a greenhouse during cold weather.

Pruning Citrus need little pruning, only its dead or broken branches. You may need to remove suckers from younger trees. Lemon trees need the most pruning of their vigorous branches.

Harvest In general, the hotter your climate, the earlier you can harvest. Fruit grown on the coast ripen last. Color is not a good indicator of ripeness. The best way to tell when to harvest your fruit is by taste.

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