



Citrus Plants

Tropical fruit trees/plants can be grown outdoors during the summer months but must be kept indoors through the winter. They do best in large, deep containers with a soil mix which allows excellent drainage. Their taste and delightful floral fragrances or “neroli,” call to mind faraway places. Aside from their striking beauty, the interest in citrus as houseplants is in their wonderful fruits. If it tastes good from your local grocer, it will taste even better home grown. Experience for yourself the zesty flavors of these vitamin rich fruits and enliven a sunny room. When you visit your local supermarkets and see the assorted colors and sizes of citrus fruits, you can’t help but wonder: “How can I grow my own?” Below are a few hardy citrus to try in your home:

Meyer Lemon

Citrus limon hybrid or Citrus x meyeri

Excellent foliage is displayed on this medium to large shrub or small tree. Fragrant flowers produce thin skinned, juicy lemons year round. Fruit is sweeter than most varieties. Shape is more round and the skin is thinner, which is great for baking. Turns slightly orange when ripe. Makes an attractive accent. Everbearing. Protect from frost.

Full Sun Grows 8-10’ H x W

Eureka Lemon

Citrus limon ‘Eureka’

Eureka lemon trees have been grown in the United States since the mid-1800s when seeds were brought over from Italy. They are considered true lemon trees, unlike the Meyer lemon tree which has a hybrid classification. Thick skinned. Bright yellow and football shaped. This variety is widely found in grocery stores. The most widely cultivated lemon variety worldwide, Eureka trees thrive in warmer climates and do well in the south and southwestern area. Everbearing. Protect from frost.

Full Sun Grows 10-20’ H x W

Pink Variegated Eureka Lemon

‘Citrus limon ‘Pink Variegated Eureka’

One of the most popular fruit trees for home-grown citrus, the Pink Variegated Lemon Tree provides lemons in just one year. Plus, because it’s dwarf-sized, it’s easy to grow almost anywhere effortlessly. Fans of the quirky and unusual will love the Eureka pink lemon tree. This little oddity produces fruit that will make you the host/hostess of the day at cocktail hour. Variegated pink lemon plants are beautiful and unique versions of the standard lemon tree. Their skin and flesh have a fascinating characteristic, but the tutti-frutti flavor makes the plant a true stand out. Yellow and green striped skin with light pink flesh. Everbearing. Protect from frost.

Full Sun Grows 12-15’ H x W

Key Lime

Citrus x aurantifolia

The key lime tree is a vigorous tropical plant that produces all year long. You’ll be flushed with citrus in early summer and late fall and receive a small yet steady harvest for the rest of the year. Not only that, but you’ll be able to enjoy the tree’s lush green growth and fragrant flowers. And let’s not forget the delicious fruit! Key limes are regular limes in miniature – about the size of a golf ball. They have a thinner peel and stronger flavor than normal limes, which more than makes up for the size. Just like classic limes though, they’re usually picked before they’re ripe. If left on the branch, they’ll eventually turn to yellow limes! Everbearing. Protect from frost.

Full Sun Grows 6-12’ H x 6-8’ W

Persian Lime

Citrus x latifolia

Persian lime, also known by other common names such as seedless lime, Bears lime and Tahiti lime, is a citrus fruit species of hybrid origin, known only in cultivation. Has no thorns. Thick skinned. Picked fruit keeps for a long time. The Persian lime is a triploid cross between key lime (*Citrus x aurantifolia*) and lemon (*Citrus limon*). The Persian lime is the variety most commonly found in grocery stores. Turns pale yellow when ripe. Everbearing. Protect from frost.

Full Sun Grows 10-15’ H x 5-10’ W

Valencia Orange

Citrus sinensis ‘Valencia’

The ultimate juicing orange, bursting with sweet citrus flavor. When the American orange industry got their hands on this wonderful fruit, it grew so fast in popularity and importance, that it was even one of the driving forces behind naming Orange County, CA. With an easy to peel, somewhat smooth rind, this orange is excellent not only for its juice, but for eating fresh out of hand as well. Protect from frost.

Full Sun Grows 12-20’ H x W

Citrus Plants (continued)

Cultural Needs

Harvest season in the South is usually from October - April and some can be year round.

Acclimatize your new citrus plant to prevent undue stress.

Try to make smooth transitions especially when moving your plants from inside to outside and back.

Temperature & Humidity

- ◆ Temperature affects the developing fruit... the hotter the temperature the quicker the fruit development.
- ◆ The rind color is a factor of humidity and temperature. The pigment of orange is anthocyanin and it is dependent on warm climates, not overly hot or humid ones.
- ◆ The pigment of grapefruit, lycopene and it is dependent upon a hot climate.
- ◆ The best way to increase humidity around citrus plants is to set the pot on a tray with pebbles and keep water just below the top level of gravel. Another way is to mist the plants 2-3 times a week (DO NOT mist foliage during the hot, sunny hours of the day).
- ◆ The acid-citrus: lemons and limes, which are the most popular citrus grown indoors, do not require heat to ripen the fruit.

Soil

pH 5.5 - 7.5

- ◆ Plant starvation and/or over-fertilization will occur above or below this range.
- ◆ Use a well draining loamy soil tolerating light sands with ample fertilizer.
- ◆ Mix your own soil using composted/shredded fir or pine bark, perlite and peat moss.
- ◆ Can succeed in heavier clay if they are well drained.

Light

- ◆ If sunny windows are not a possible location for your new citrus, supply bright, artificial light from 8am to 6pm. Requires 5 hours or more direct light.

Water

- ◆ Citrus plants require regular, deep watering.
- ◆ Let the plant dry out in between waterings.
- ◆ Avoid keeping the area around the trunk wet.
- ◆ Never allow plant roots to sit in water.

Fertilizer

- ◆ Citrus are heavy feeders and require high nitrogen fertilizer, like Fertilome Fruit & Citrus Fertilizer. (19-10-5)
- ◆ Regular foliar sprays or Liquid iron and other micronutrients are beneficial.
- ◆ A healthy plant is the first step to pest prevention.

Pollination

Most citrus are self-fertile, but hand-pollination with a small paint brush improves fruit production. This is especially necessary if your plant goes into bloom in the winter when inside.

Pruning

- ◆ Little pruning is required for most citrus.
- ◆ Lemons produce abundant upright suckers which must be removed.
- ◆ Remove suckers, dead twigs and extra long growth.
- ◆ Prune only to shape the plant and keep it relatively compact for the space it has in your home.
- ◆ Clip off any fruit as it ripens, DO NOT PULL.
- ◆ A freshly pruned plant is susceptible to sunburn, avoid placing it in full sun.
- ◆ Remove excess fruit so as not to stress the plant.

Citrus Plants Troubleshooting:

Some common problems that you may encounter and their remedies

Problem	Cause	Solution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ New leaves turn pale green or yellow, new leaves can turn completely white. ◆ Older leaves turn yellow with veins remaining green. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Iron deficiency ◆ Micronutrients may be deficient 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Check soil pH (iron cannot be absorbed at pH above 7.5) ◆ Apply Liquid Iron every 2 weeks during the growing season (but not in high temps of 85° F) ◆ Improve soil drainage
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ New foliage turns pale green. ◆ Older leaves turn yellow and may drop ◆ Stunted growth overall. ◆ Plant has abundant flowers but produces no fruit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Nitrogen deficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Spray and water with fertilizer that is high in nitrogen. ◆ Make sure the soil is not too wet.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Leaf buds shrivel and turn brown. ◆ Young leaves are curled, distorted, silvery streaks appear on fruit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Thrips (minute brown insects especially invasive in hot, dry climates) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Spray leaves thoroughly with insecticide or horticultural oil. ◆ DO NOT apply sprays within 7 days of harvest. ◆ Do not spray while in bloom or when temperatures are 85° F or higher.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ New leaves are curled/twisted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Aphids (tiny green, brown or black sucking insects usually found clustered on growing shoots) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Use an insecticide, horticultural oil or insecticidal soap. ◆ Ladybugs (put out in evening)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Leaves are stippled, yellowing, webbing appears over flower buds and between leaves and branches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Spider mites (minute brown, red, and black spiders) ◆ Invasive in hot dry conditions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Use miticide (use cold water when mixing solution to shock mites). ◆ Horticultural oil ◆ Insecticidal soap ◆ Dormant Oil in Fall to control eggs “wash” plant w/ a water spray to knock spider mites off
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ White, cottony masses on leaves stems & branches ◆ Mealy bugs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Invasive in hot dry conditions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Spray with horticultural oil.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Foliage withers, turns yellow and drops; fruit may drop. ◆ Sticky substance (honeydew) coats leaves and may develop sooty mold. Tree declines in health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Cottony Scale (Scale insects excrete honeydew) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Use Horticultural Oil and a non-systemic insecticide. ◆ Insecticidal Soap
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ A squiggly, shiny residue on the underside of new leaves, resembling Elmer’s glue. Often causing new leaves to curl under. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Leaf Miners (Small caterpillar) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Pinch off new leaves if caught soon. ◆ Use Horticultural Oil—apply to undersides of leaves
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Tiny white insects, will eventually cause sooty mold on leaves (may not appear until Fall) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Whiteflies ◆ Hummingbirds! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Apply insecticidal soap (2 applications of Horticultural Oil in late fall will remove sooty mold)

FAQ About Citrus

How big do citrus trees grow?

This depends on where they are planted, and the care received. In general, if you plant a dwarf citrus tree in a container, over the years with good care it will top out in height at around 6-8 feet, depending upon variety. The same tree might get twice as tall in the ground. Pruning is always an option for keeping them shorter.

Is my situation adequate for growing an indoor citrus tree?

Blooming and fruiting is dependent on sufficient light and heat. Citrus trees in a dark or shaded space may produce foliage but not flower. If you do not have a bright (preferably South facing) window, skylight or greenhouse, you may need to supplement with grow lights. For best results indoors, simulate California weather by providing a minimum of 8 hours of direct light each day.

Why do blooms or fruit drop off?

Some fruit drop is normal, especially in hot summer months. If fruit or bloom drop is excessive, proper watering is often the solution. Extremely hot, dry, windy weather will trigger fruit drop. Be sure trees are well watered in these situations. Be consistent in your watering schedule.

What is the time from bloom to edible fruit?

For lemons and limes, the time from bloom to edible fruit is generally 6-9 months. For winter oranges and other citrus, it is generally 12 months. Keep in mind that all citrus fruits only ripen on the tree.

How do I tell if fruit is ripe?

Keep in mind that all citrus fruits only ripen on the tree. In temperate areas. Lemons are ready when yellow, and generally hold on the tree for months. The best way to determine ripeness for oranges is to watch for the color to change, then check for a slight softening of the fruit. The development of a waxy opaque sheen on the rind is another indicator of ripening.

How do I select the best containers?

Overly wet roots are the leading cause of problems of container grown citrus. Many of those problems can be minimized with careful container choices and a moisture meter that can prevent over watering. Clay pots are classic but heavy choices. Clay pots work well when the citrus are indoors because they will help the root ball dry out in a timely fashion. In the summer the clay pots dry out very quickly and you may spend a large amount of time watering your tree.

Citrus should only be moved up to a pot about two inches bigger than what they are in each year or every other year. A container that is too large may not dry out evenly and can lead to root rot.

The roots of potted citrus trees may also become overheated due to excessive sun exposure. One solution is to nest the pot into a larger one which will buffer heat on the roots.

What should I do before bringing my citrus inside for the winter?

Place the container where it will receive only morning sun for two weeks. Then place it in completely shaded place for two weeks. Remove all dead branches and leaves from both the plant and the surface of the soil.

Blast the tree with the garden hose to remove any unseen pests before bringing it inside for the winter. Use an insecticidal soap or horticultural oil to kill any remaining pests or eggs.