



Sustainable
Landscape Solutions

CITRUS CARE GUIDE

Although not difficult, citrus do benefit from some special planting and fertilization measures to promote strong, productive plants.

WHEN TO PLANT: Containerized citrus trees can be planted throughout the year but mid-winter would not be the most practical time to plant a cold sensitive variety.

WHERE TO PLANT: Citrus do best in **Full Sun** but slightly shady areas may provide some protection from winter cold. Provide at least 10 to 15' between trees. Larger trees such as grapefruit will need more space while smaller trees like limes and kumquats can get by with less. Citrus should not be planted in the middle of a lawn where they would have to compete with grass for nutrients. Placement on the south or east side of a building may shelter them from winter winds, and planting near surfaces such as concrete walls that absorb daytime heat can help by radiating the heat back at night.

HOW TO PLANT: Dig a hole the same depth as the root ball (only deeper if the soil is extremely rocky or sandy) but 2 to 3 times wider. This allows the roots to grow out easily while keeping surrounding compacted soil from pulling moisture away from the plant. It also keeps the root ball from settling too deeply. Keeping the soil level at the **Same Planting Depth** as it was in the pot, or even a little higher, is very important. We recommend mixing some Jolly Gardener Organic Compost or similar high grade planting mix, into the existing soil. Shave away any fibrous roots from the sides of the root ball and slice any circling roots to keep them from girdling the tree as it grows. It also helps to remove a little soil from the root ball to provide a better interface between it and existing soil so water passes better between the 2 soil types. Place the tree in the hole (again, keeping the top of the root ball level with the existing ground or even slightly higher), fill the hole with water, let it drain, make sure the tree is straight and fill the hole with soil. Press the soil down over the root ball. Ensure there are no weeds within the drip line of the tree and use leftover soil to create a ring around the root ball area to hold water until it can seep in. Mulching under citrus trees is not recommended; mulch should be kept a minimum of 1' away from the trunk, or better yet, not used at all.

WATERING: Fill the basin you have created under the tree with 8 to 10 gallons of water about twice weekly for the first month. Thereafter, watering can be less frequent but whenever new growth appears to wilt in the afternoon, fill the basin again. With age of the tree the need for supplemental watering is decreased, but there may be occasions where watering is necessary throughout the life of the tree.

FERTILIZING: All citrus trees are fairly heavy feeders and need a steady supply of nitrogen and trace elements throughout the growing season. You can begin fertilizing your tree during March to early October a few weeks after planting. Organic or non-organic conventional fertilizers can be used 3 or 4 times during the season, but younger trees benefit from more frequent applications. Fertilizers with an 8-8-8 analysis and containing other macro and micronutrients are good general fertilizers for citrus. We recommend Dr. Earth Natural Wonder Fruit Tree fertilizer or Fertilome Fruit, Citrus and Pecan fertilizer. Apply at rates following product directions. If you wish to see more specific fertilizing instructions taking into account age of the tree, refer to IFAS Publication #HS-867 (University of Florida), "Citrus Culture in the Home Landscape" online. Fertilizer should cover the basin area the first year but not touch the trunk, and spread out farther in succeeding years. The optimum pH range is 5.5 to 6.5.

PRUNING: Never prune citrus trees until new growth begins in spring. At this time cuts can be made at least 1/2" below any wood damaged by cold weather. Young trees may develop suckers near the base of the tree. These should be removed as they are likely of the rootstock variety on grafted trees, will not produce desirable fruit and will interfere with tree development. Very vigorous vertical shoots are slow to bear fruit and interfere with more productive stems so should be pruned out also. During a tree's first 1 to 2 years, substantial removal of flowers and fruit will help direct energy to growth of the tree. Aside from the above, mature trees do not require any pruning of the canopy for production or tree health.

DISEASE AND INSECT CONTROL: Most citrus can be successfully grown in the home landscape without chemical pesticides. If warranted, a horticultural oil can be used to suppress mites and scale, and copper fungicides can be used to control most fungal diseases. However, the appearance of HLB disease (citrus greening) and its vector the Asian Citrus Psyllid in Florida has necessitated control programs for some. Symptoms of affected trees can include curling and distortion of young leaves, yellow veins, blotchy yellow patches that are different on the left and right sides of the leaf and misshapen fruit. Imidacloprid is the current recommended treatment, which is available in products like Bayer Advanced Fruit, Citrus and Vegetable Insect Control. For the most up-to-date information on the disease and its treatment, refer to the University of Florida's Citrus Research and Education Center, 863-956-1151.

GROWING IN CONTAINERS: Drainage is key when growing citrus in pots. Use a quality potting soil which is friable, fast draining yet moisture retentive. Citrus like a slightly acid soil, so some sphagnum peat in the mix is helpful. Make sure the pot you choose has sufficient drainage holes or drill some extra ones (use a Diamond tip drill bit while spraying with water). Putting gravel in the bottom of the container when potting your tree will not aid drainage and may even impede it. Shave away any fibrous roots from the sides of the root ball. Make sure that the tree is planted at the same height with respect to the soil, as it was in its original container. Most citrus eventually need a 20 to 25 gallon container and should not be expected to grow as large as if it were in-ground. If you are starting with a small tree, the container size should be gradually increased as the tree and its roots grow, to avoid soil which stays too wet. If a frost or freeze is expected, small containers should be brought indoors or under cover.

COLD PROTECTION: Use a fiberglass stake or similar to drape breathable cotton sheets or Frost Blankets (available in our store) over citrus that aren't cold hardy.

Gardening success depends on many factors and problems can arise unique to your situation. Guidelines can be open to interpretation. If you need additional information, we would be happy to help.