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Citrus Care



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Caring for Your Container Grown Citrus

Citrus trees can make lovely houseplants. These slow-growing evergreen trees produce sweetly scented flowers followed by fruit. Not all of your tree's flowers will develop into fruit as the tree will only develop the amount of fruit that it can bear given its current size. As your tree ages, your fruit will improve. Phelan's carries dwarf type citrus that are everbearing. The lemon, lime and orange varieties listed could produce fruit all year, but expect the heaviest crops to ripen in Winter, except for Persian Lime which bear more in the Summer months. Varieties we typically offer include: Meyer, Eureka, Pink Variegated lemons; Persian Limes (large/thornless) Key Limes (small/thorny) and Calamondin oranges (small sour oranges). **Note:** The peel of Calamondin oranges is sweet, but the fruit is VERY sour. They are good producers since the fruit stays small and can be used in place of limes.

Light

Citrus will take as much light as you can give them. Although foliage can adapt to less light, a minimum of six hours of direct sunlight is necessary for flowering and fruit production. Place in a south or southwest facing window indoors when temps are too cold to keep it outside. In summer, your citrus would love to live outside in a protected, shady location once nighttime temps are CONSISTENTLY at or above 50 degrees.

***TIPS FOR SEASONAL ACCLIMATION:**

Citrus will drop their leaves if changes in the environment are too sudden. For instance, if you decide to put your citrus outdoors during the summer months, place it in a **shady area**. Yes, they are typically full sun plants—but in

Colorado, we ask them to live inside 8 months out of the year. Outdoor shade is similar to the amount of light your indoor sunny window gives it and won't be such a drastic change when you have to bring it back inside. Placing your citrus in a very sunny outdoor location and then trying to bring it back inside come fall, could leave you with a leafless plant because the amount of light will be drastically less no matter how sunny your indoor window is!

Water

During summer, water when the top 2 inches of your soil are dry. Don't allow the soil to ever become boggy. It is very important to maintain oxygen in the soil. An overly-wet soil will suffocate your tree. This is usually more of a problem in winter when your tree is not actively growing and therefore not using the water as quickly. During winter, adjust your irrigation to where your tree goes lightly dry between waterings. But, you can mist the leaves to help ward off spider mites during this especially dry time of year.

Fertilization

Citrus prefer a complete fertilizer with micronutrients. Aim for a nitrogen ratio of around 2-1-1. Granular citrus food with slow release nitrogen is recommended. It will break down slowly and feed your tree a little each time you water. See label for specific feeding intervals, keeping in mind that since you are growing your citrus in a container, you are likely to be watering more in summer and less in winter. However, most will recommend feeding indoor citrus 3-4 times per year or every 3-4 months. Some growers also recommend supplementing those granular feeds in older established container plants with a mild water soluble plant food during the active growing season (Feb-Sept). Age Old Grow 12-6-6 would have an appropriate formulation for citrus. Like palms, citrus is sensitive to a lack of micronutrients (i.e. zinc, iron, magnesium or

manganese). So, using a fertilizer specifically for citrus is key. In particular, lack of magnesium can cause yellow leaves with dark green veins in OLDER leaves starting at the tip and edges moving toward the stem. You can counter this type of deficiency by dissolving 1 tsp Epsom salt/quart of water and watering in or just use an appropriate citrus fertilizer. Yellow leaves with dark green veins in YOUNG leaves may indicate lack of iron. Overall yellowing may signal a lack of nitrogen or overwatering.

Re-potting

Your tree may be repotted when it is actively growing. This usually occurs when our days begin to lengthen in spring-early summer. You should ONLY repot your citrus when its roots have filled up the current pot. (this could take several years) When choosing a new pot allow a couple of inches of room for future growth. Avoid a large jump in size. A good guide is to re-pot into a container that is 2" larger than your existing pot. When you re-pot your tree, make sure the top of your root ball is level with your soil. In other words, don't "bury" your root ball. Also, you should use a rich, well drained, slightly acidic soil. Fertillome potting soil mixed with at least 1/3 and up to 1/2 cactus soil (or even perlite) is a good mix that will aid in faster draining soil that helps your tree from retaining too much moisture at the roots.

Yellow Leaves

***NORMAL LEAF DROP:** In winter, it is natural for older leaves to yellow and drop. This usually happens just before the tree begins to actively grow in spring.

***ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS:** If your tree is dropping massive amounts of leaves or yellowing en masse, it is possible that your plant is 1) being kept too wet 2) not receiving enough light 3) is too cold = min temp 45 deg 4) is lacking nutrients 5) or has spider mite or another pest problem such as scale.