



West Mare Lane  
Marehill  
Pulborough  
West Sussex RH20 2EA  
Tel 01798 872786

[www.citruscentre.co.uk](http://www.citruscentre.co.uk)

# Care Sheet

~April 2016~

## Citrus cultivation

Do's and Don'ts

Citrus plants are easy to grow. They will give you great pleasure with their deep green glossy foliage, exquisitely scented blossom followed by edible fruits.

### **SUMMER CONDITIONS**

Citrus plants are happy to stand outside after the spring frosts have ended (usually about the end of May). Plants should be placed in a shady spot and gradually crept into full sun over the course of a week or so to prevent leaf scorch. They should remain in the sun for the rest of the summer. The more sun the better!

Citrus can stand 38 °C (100°F) or more, but above 35°C (96°F) will cease to grow, therefore they usually fare much better outside for the duration of the summer. If they are kept in a conservatory or greenhouse in the summer, they must have ample ventilation.

Extreme care must be exercised in late spring, before plants have been moved outside, when the temperatures in conservatories and greenhouses can soar on sunny days, vents must be opened to prevent over-heating.

The exception to the rule is the Kumquat. Although it is relatively hardy, it takes a lot of heat to bring it into flower therefore it is the only citrus we recommend leaving in the conservatory or greenhouse for the Summer or until it flowers which is late July early August.

### **WINTER CONDITIONS**

Before the first frosts appear plants must be moved into warmer conditions for the Winter months. Citrus need as much light as possible. Small plants can be kept within the house on a south facing windowsill or by patio doors, away from radiators and larger plants kept in conservatories or greenhouses. Whilst most Citrus can withstand temperatures just above freezing, they will fare far better if kept warmer. At the nursery we over-winter plants at 4°C (40°f) minimum.

Try to avoid sudden extremes of temperature as this can stress plants and cause leaf and blossom drop. Temperatures in conservatories can vary considerably between day and night, ventilate well during sunny days.

Whilst the plant is indoors we suggest standing Citrus on “pot feet” in a tray.

**Never allow the plant to stand in water.**

## **WATERING**

This is the key to successful Citrus growing.

The plants should be watered, from the top, thoroughly. This means flushing plenty of water through the pot so the compost is completely soaked. Then the plant must be left to **almost completely dry out** between each watering.

Gauging when plants need watering can be tricky, however we find that the leaves may lack lustre, become dull and even start to droop. At this point we feel several inches into the pots to check that it is dry. If you have fruit that is about golf ball size, check to see if it is soft, if it is then this is a good indication that it might need watering, as the plant will take the water from the fruit when it is dry. Finally we check the weight of the pot, which is very light when dry. If in doubt wait another day and check again.

It is better to under water than over water. “For every Citrus plant killed by under watering, 200 are killed by over watering”.

Tap water is fine to use, however do not use softened water as this can contain sodium salts. Rainwater can be used providing it is from a clean source, although tap water is necessary once every few waterings to supply the calcium needed.

- **Always flush the pot thoroughly with plenty of water and allow to drain away.**
- **Do not water a little at a time.**
- **Do not stand plants in water. This will quickly cause root rot.**

## **FEEDING**

We produce our own liquid fertiliser especially for Citrus, which contains the correct nutrient balance and trace elements for healthy growth and fruiting.

Citrus are greedy plants and to get a good crop of fruit they need constant year round feeding. One 25ml measure, of our feed, should be mixed with 10 litres (2 gallons) of water. This should be used whenever the plant is dry.

Folia feeding once a month with the same solution, in winter and spring, can greatly increase fruit set and health of plant as waterings are few and far between in the winter months.

It is a good idea always to keep a watering can full of mixed feed in the same room as the plant so that the roots don't get a shock from cold water, which can stress the plant.

## **RE-POTTING**

We have our compost mixed specially for us, which is a very free draining peat media. It is not Ericaceous and does contain lime to adjust the pH to about 6. This is available at the nursery.

A reasonable alternative can be made by mixing 25% chipped bark to a coarse commercial peat compost. Use a commercial compost and not straight peat. Peat on it's own is too acidic as it does not contain lime.

Re-pot before the plant becomes root bound. Late Spring is the best time to re-pot but it can be done at any time of the year whilst there is active growth but preferably before the end of August, not through the cold Winter months.

## **PRUNING**

Citrus usually require very little pruning, naturally becoming well-shaped plants. Pinching the ends off long new growth will encourage more sprouting further back along the branches and lead to a bushier plant. Occasionally some new sprouts will turn into rapid growing vertical shoots, enlarging at the expense of others and unbalancing the look of the tree. These are called water sprouts and should be pruned back to the line of the tree, where they should settle down and produce fruit like the other branches.

Lemons can become straggly after a few years and benefit from the occasional hard pruning in early spring. This usually will not mean losing the current year's flowers, as they will soon be produced on the abundance of new growth that should occur.

Citrus will sprout from new, old, and very old wood so if a tree needs tidying up the cuts can be made at any point.

Most Citrus are grafted, so any sprouts from below the graft union should be removed by rubbing off with the thumb whilst still young.

## **PESTS**

The two main pests that affect Citrus in this country are Red Spider Mite and Scale Insect.

A soapy water wash off every now and then does wonders in keeping their numbers down, as well as cleaning the leaves.

An alternative is SB Plant Invigorator that is a folia feed spray that contains a special wetting agent that suffocates the main Citrus pests below.

Check out the sundries section on our website for more details.

**Red Spider Mite** is resistant to most pesticides and can be a problem in conservatories and greenhouses. We find biological control, when introduced early in the year, very effective. There are number of companies that specialise in biological control by mail order and it is a very cost effective answer, usually lasting all season. For those plants placed outdoors for the summer a few washes off with the hose will usually keep the mite at bay.

**Scale Insects** can cause sticky residues on the leaves, followed by black sooty mould. This mould, in itself, is not damaging to the plants (unlike the insects) but is unsightly and needs thorough washing to remove.

Aphids can cause minor problems by feeding on new growth and causing the leaves to become distorted as they expand (strong winds can have the same effect). Washing will again, usually solve the problem, but there are a number of very effective Aphidicides commonly available. An alternative is to pinch off the tips of the new growth affected with the pest before it spreads to the rest of the plant.

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If you have any further questions you wish to ask or suggestions to make, please call Chris or Amanda Dennis on 01798 872786 or visit the nursery.

Opening hours are: Tuesday to Saturday 9.30am to 4pm

Register at our website at [www.citruscentre.co.uk](http://www.citruscentre.co.uk)

**Those registered will receive regular seasonal growing tips and news about the nursery by email.**