

Citrus Tree Care

Growing dwarf citrus trees, especially the Meyer lemon, is extremely rewarding in Northeast Ohio due to their continuous, sweetly scented blooms, their ability to produce fruit despite a shortened growing season, (comparatively to Florida), their compact habit, and their adaptability in container gardens to move inside for the winter months and out again onto the porch or patio come summer.

Flowering, fruiting and foliage- Most citrus trees possess glossy, evergreen foliage with fragrant clusters of white to cream to light pink blossoms that are self-fruitful and require no other pollinators. With a Meyer lemon, clusters of up to 6-8, thick skinned, juicy fruit will form late spring through summer. Thin immature fruit if your prerogative is to grow larger, but lesser yields. Proceed with caution when handling citrus, some varieties may have spines or sharp edges; their thorns can be easily removed with pruning shears.

Light- Citrus require 6+ hours of direct sunlight (full sun) to bloom well. Indoors a south or west facing window with bright direct light is best to continue blooming. If the plant is placed in indirect light it will continue to grow, but may not flower well and the foliage may lighten in color. When it is time to transition the citrus from inside to outside, do this slowly in mid-May over two weeks time starting under a tree in a shady, protected area, then gradually moving out into full sun.

Temperature- With any citrus plant you will want to mimic "tropical" conditions; they enjoy heat and humidity. Minimum temperature they can withstand for a prolonged period of time is 45 degrees. An ideal temperature range for them to flourish is 60-85 degrees F. In the fall, expose your citrus tree to one or two frosts in order to slow their growth and make an easier transition indoors, into winter dormancy.

Watering- Water thoroughly and deeply when the soil feels slightly dry. Citrus growing in containers may need daily watering in the middle of summer, and only once every two weeks during the winter, changing with the seasons and growing conditions. Spray misting or using a humidity tray during their stay indoors is beneficial, and will also keep away certain pests like spider mites.

Feeding- Citrus prefer a high nitrogen, acidic fertilizer with a 2-1-1 ratio, 3-1-1 ratio or a close equivalent. Miracid® is an excellent water soluble, acidic plant food that can be applied to citrus once every other week April to October as directed.

Other maintenance needs- Repot in the spring using a moistened, well-drained potting mix if roots are exposed or the plant dries out very quickly indoors. Little pruning is needed; suckers and damaged or diseased growth can be removed anytime. It is best to prune citrus in late winter to reduce size or to shape their growth habit. An insecticidal soap spray or Whitney Farms® 3-in-1 Rose & Flower Care are best at controlling any disease or insect infestation the plant may develop indoors or out.

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