

# Growing Citrus

By moving container-grown citrus into a greenhouse, sunroom, or bright indoor location during the winter, gardeners anywhere can grow them. If you hope to harvest fruit, choose a naturally acidic citrus, not a sweet orange or grapefruit. Examples of acidic varieties include 'Improved Meyer' and 'Ponderosa' lemons, calamondins, and kumquats. These are most likely to produce fruit indoors in winter. Other citrus will grow and flower but are less likely to produce fruit.

## What Citrus like:

- Full sun
- Protection from the wind
- High quality potting soil
- A large garden pot with good drainage
- Consistent watering - soil should be damp not wet
- Regular feeding (except during the heart of winter) with either all-purpose or high nitrogen fertilizer
- Temperatures between 50-80°F though will survive down to 32°F

## What Citrus don't like:

- Wet feet (too much water will kill them)
- Freezing temperatures
- Not enough or too much fertilizer
- Not enough light
- Strong winds

**Potting:** Use a premixed sterile potting soil designed for container plants. Never use ordinary garden soil even good soil for container citrus. What is just fine in the ground just won't work in a container. Once confined in a container, most garden soils are too dense and water drains too slowly.

**Sun and Temperature:** All citrus trees love sun - the more the better. They are happiest in temperatures between 50-80°F.

In spring, bring your tree outside, and put it in a sunny protected spot when nighttime temperatures are consistently above 50. It's a good idea to slowly acclimate any plant to outdoor conditions by hardening it off. Harden off by making the transition gradual: in at night, out during day, for about a month

When moving your plants outdoors in spring or back indoors in fall, use the hardening off method. Also, before moving the plant indoors, shower it completely with warm and slightly soapy water to wash off any bugs. Pests that you don't notice outdoors can become problems once inside.

You'll want to bring your citrus tree inside when temperatures start regularly dipping below 50°F. Compared to outdoors, homes in winter are darker and warmer, and have much drier air. That's why anything you can do to provide additional light and extra humidity is so benefi-

*(Continued on page 2)*



NEW GARDEN  
LANDSCAPING & NURSERY

newgarden.com  
email:info@newgarden.com

**New Garden Gazebo**  
3811 Lawndale Dr.  
Greensboro, NC 27455  
phone: 336-288-8893



New Garden Landscaping & Nursery

"Where your imagination takes root"

# Growing Citrus cont.

*(Continued from page 1)*

cial: grow lights, and a tray of pebbles under the pot. Cool, bright rooms, such as a partially heated sunroom, are best.

**Feeding:** During the growing season, spring to fall, feed your citrus plant regularly with either a high nitrogen fertilizer, a slow release all-purpose fertilizer, or Espoma CitrusTone. Citrus trees also respond well to additional foliar feeding with a liquid fertilizer like compost tea or liquid kelp or fish emulsion.

If using slow-release/controlled release fertilizers feed in January or February to enhance the spring bloom, May or June to encourage good fruit set, and again in fall (September/October) to keep the plant fed through the winter.

**Watering:** Proper watering is one of the keys to growing any citrus plant, but particularly those grown in garden pots. The aim is to keep the soil moist but not wet. Stick your finger into the soil, at least up to the second knuckle. If you feel dampness at your fingertip, wait to water. If it feels dry, water your plant until you see it run out of the bottom of the pot. Plants in containers generally require more frequent watering than the same plants in open soil, and citrus are no exception. Especially during hot, dry, or windy weather, daily watering may be necessary. The basic rule is to soak the rootball thoroughly until water drains out the bottom once the top 2 to 3 inches of soil are dry.

In some situations, water will drain out the bottom of the pot without soaking the rootball. This happens when the rootball dries and shrinks slightly, pulling away from the edges of the container. The water moves down the gap without rewetting the roots. To help rewet the dried rootball, place three or four drops of a mild dish soap on it. The soap will help the water soak in so the rootball can expand to fill the container again.

Frequent watering causes needed nutrients to wash through the soil more quickly than is typical in most soils. Controlled-release or slow-release fertilizers are less apt to immediately wash through soil, making a single application useful for a longer time. (Exactly how long depends upon the specific fertilizer and your watering frequency.) Soluble liquid fertilizers generally provide more exacting control but also require more frequent applications, every other week or so. In either case, follow the directions on the label of the fertilizer you choose.

**Growing Citrus Indoors:** When your plant is inside, you'll want to give it as much light as possible. This can be done by placing it in a sunny window or by setting it under grow lights or shop lights fitted with one cool and one warm bulb. However, you might be able to keep your lemon alive if you give it enough bright, indirect sun.

**Harvesting:** If you keep your lemon tree indoors for the winter, your fruit can take up to a year to ripen. Because citrus fruit will only continue to ripen while it is still on the tree, make sure to wait until it's ripe before picking. Use a knife or scissor to cut off the fruit so you don't risk damaging the plant by pulling off a larger piece than intended.



New Garden Landscaping & Nursery

"Where your imagination takes root"