

Growing Citrus in the Northwest

The scent of the flowers is intoxicating! Colorful edible fruits and dark glossy green leaves make citrus plants a great container choice.

It may not be practical to grow citrus as large fruiting trees totally in the outdoors in our climate, but it is possible to enhance a sunny area in your home or the summer patio with a citrus plant.

The fruits on these dwarf trees are the same size as a full grown citrus tree, and the flavor is just as delicious. They will do best in full sun or as close as you can get to that condition, indoors or out.

Water as any container grown plant...let the plant get somewhat dry between watering.

Fertilize with a citrus fertilizer like 'Espoma Citrus-tone' in the spring or summer prior to the flush of new growth and again in late August. If the plant becomes chlorotic (indicated by leaves that are yellowish in color) - an application of liquid iron may be needed.

Pruning - Although dwarf citrus can grow to 6-8 feet, they can be pruned at any time to keep the plant compact and bushy. Repot in early spring when you see signs of new growth, but only if necessary (not yearly). They seem to like to be rootbound to encourage blooming. If you do not wish to 'pot up' to a larger size, treat the plant as a bonsai. Remove the plant, trim some top growth and some root growth, add soil and replant in same size container. Propagate by stem cuttings in late summer or early fall.

Pests - Common spider mites, mealy bug and scale can occur. Use neem or horticultural oil to treat organically. Look for honeydew as an indicator of problems. The best cure is prevention. Contact AI's Indoor Plant Experts for further advice.

Hardiness - These citrus plants are hardy to Zone 9. In the Northwest, many folks who grow citrus keep them outdoors mostly year-round. To protect against the winter conditions, move containerized plant close to the house and out of constant winter wind and rain. Remember to water as needed. If the temperature drops below 30° F, bring the plant into a more protected area like inside a garage or the home where temperatures will not freeze plant and return the plant to outdoors when temperatures rise.

Popular citrus choices are:

Improved Meyer Lemon is one of the most productive citrus trees. It will produce fruit year round. It is actually a sour mandarin orange. Best of all, it has thin-skinned fruits that are **especially sweet and succulent**.

Eureka Lemon produces an abundance of juicy and 'lemony' tart fruits with few seeds.

Bearss Limes are a medium-sized and relatively seedless fruit. They are vigorous and easily grown with prolific white flowers followed by green-yellow fruit.

Dwarf Washington Navel Oranges are a delicious, easily peeled, seedless sweet fruit with a good orange flavor.

Kumquats – These little gems of the citrus family are intensely flavored fruits. The rind is sweet while the juicy center is sour. It is one of the hardiest of the citrus plants.