

Planting and care of citrus

Position

1. Trees must be planted in full sun.
2. Their roots need to breathe more than other trees, so soil should be well-drained and fairly light in texture. Heavy clay soils are not recommended. The PH or acidity of the soil is not too important.
3. They do not tolerate heavy frost and must be protected from frost and cold winds in colder areas.
4. Space trees 5m apart to allow for air circulation.
5. Citrus are self-pollinating except for Satsuma and Mandarin which need any orange for cross pollination.
6. Citrus usually hangs well, so can be left on the tree when ripe until needed.

Planting

1. Prepare large holes 75cm deep and at least 60cm wide.
2. The top soil must be mixed well at the bottom of the hole together with \pm 4kg of well-rotted kraal manure, 5kg compost and 500g superphosphate or Bonemeal.
3. Remove the nursery container carefully so as not to disturb the roots. Plant the citrus tree about 2cm higher than what it was in the nursery container. It is important that the water drains away from the stem.
4. Stake young trees.
5. Make sure to tramp down firmly around the stem to ensure the roots are in good contact with the soil.
6. Regular watering is most important, especially when trees are flowering and setting fruit (ie. From July/August until March). They must not be allowed to dry out completely. A good mulch of bark or compost will help prevent this.

Feeding

1. Fertilizer must be applied in July or December, but must never be applied near the trunk of the tree. Apply on top of the mulch and water in.
2. Young trees should be given 150g of L.A.N as above for the first year.
3. Established trees should be given 150g of 2:3:2 (22) SR each time, gradually increasing to 2,5kg each time (ie. 7,5kg annually) for mature trees.
4. In addition, give each tree 75g of magnesium sulphate (Epsom salts) three times per year.
5. Water well before and after fertilizing.
6. A foliar feed of seaweed extract or other soluble fertilizer every two months will make large glossy green leaves.

Pruning

Lemons and citrus. Establish strong framework on young trees.

Cut out older branches that hang down and encourage new growth from the center. Remove suckers from base as they develop.

Pests and diseases

Take the problem to your local garden centre for advice.

Recommended Varieties

Lemons

Lemons are the hardiest of all citrus with regard to frost and cold.

Try Eureka, Variegated Eureka, Rough-skin or Genoa lemon varieties.

Oranges

Oranges need winter protection as blooms and fruit will be damaged by severe frost, except in coastal areas.

Limes

Limes are reasonably hardy but blooms and fruit need protection from severe frost.

Grapefruit

The variety Jackson, a white-fleshed grapefruit, is more adaptable to cooler growing conditions. Other varieties are March seedless, a white, and red blush with a pink flesh.

Naartjies

Empress Mandarin naartjie needs a warm climate to flourish.

Tangelo

Tangelo mineola is a cross between a naartjie and a grapefruit.

Miniature Oranges

These are extremely ornamental plants and make excellent container plants for the sunny patio. Kumquat grows to a 2m height and the fruit is often used for preserves. Calamondin is a smaller variety growing to a 1,5m height and a delightful container plant.

Winter Protection

Citrus plants are likely to suffer damage from severe frosts, but this will only be temporary.

However, as they bloom and bear fruit in the winter, efforts should be made to protect the crop.

This can be done by erecting a frost guard structure around the plants, which should be open on the North side. They can also be planted where they are protected from early morning sun, or against a North or West-facing wall, where the heat, accumulated during the day, will be given off at night and prevent frost damage to the tree. The only citrus that can withstand severe frost is lemons.