

JUST FRUITS

AND EXOTICS

CONTAINER CITRUS

INTRODUCTION

Container citrus growing is fun, easy and productive. Containers allow folks in temperate climates, apartment dwellers, and even those of us in the subtropical zones to enjoy fresh homegrown oranges, kumquats, lemons and limes. With a few simple steps, anyone can enjoy successful citrus growing.

CONTAINERS

They can be plastic, metal, ceramic, wood or whatever you come up with, as long as they are large enough for the plant, and have adequate holes in the bottom to provide drainage. A pot about 15 inches across and 15 inches deep (7 gallon container) is good for starting one of our 1 year old trees. Never put a young citrus tree in too big of a pot, they will actually stall and stop growing. Plan to provide a saucer, dish or plate to protect floors and carpets from water. Don't allow the bottom of your container to sit in standing water. Use a brick(s) or anything to create a space between the container and the saucer

SOIL

Most commercially available potting soils are fine for citrus, or you can mix 1 part clean sand, 1 part peat and 1 part pine bark. The rootstocks we use on our grafted citrus require an acidic soil, so NO manure, mushroom compost or manure teas, please!

POTTING

Partially fill the container with soil, so that when you put the plant in, the original planting level (the top of the root ball) is about 4 inches below the rim of the pot. Fill up the pot to the planting level, and gently tamp it in. Water thoroughly to settle the roots and eliminate air pockets. Remember - Do not bury your tree! Citrus trees like their roots close to the surface.

LIGHT

The more the merrier. Citrus trees grow best in full sunlight, and indoor plants are usually limited by lack of light. Your new tree is used to 8 to 14 hours per day of Florida sunshine. Avoid drastic changes in the amount of light your tree receives. If you're planning to bring it indoors for the winter, start about three weeks ahead of time to gradually move it into shadier and shadier spots

WATER

Although potted trees are especially vulnerable to dryness, most watering mistakes involve over watering. Sun exposure, hot or windy days, and air-conditioning will increase the need for watering, while cool cloudy days have the opposite effect. As a rule of thumb, wait until the top inch or two of soil is dry to the touch, and then water by slowly filling the container until thoroughly wet.

FERTILIZATION

Starter Fertilizer & Soil (Apply at Planting)	Fertilizer to Maintain (Apply Early March, Late May, & Late July)
Espoma Bio-tone® Starter Plus Mix Peat Moss in Soil	Espoma Citrus-tone®

Notes:

- Follow Instructions on Bag for how much to apply each time.
- Fertilizing Zones 8 and below: Months to Fertilize vary based on your zone. Fertilize 3 times per year. For Citrus in Zone 8 and below We recommend the 1st fertilization starting after the last Freeze of the winter (Late February/Early March in zones 8) & the last Fertilization being no later than August or even June/July in some of the colder zones 7 & below.)
- For Zones 9 and above: You may follow the Espoma Citrus-tone® Fact Sheet recommendations of; Late Winter January/February pre-bloom application to enhance flowering, Late Spring May/June Post-bloom application to encourage better fruit set, and Late Fall September/October application to ensure overall nutrient needs are met.
- Fertilizing too late in the year in colder climates will promote new growth, which will be subject to freeze damage.

Spread the fertilizer evenly under the entire canopy of the plant, avoiding a 6 inch area around the trunk. Water or rake in. If using Espoma fertilizer and you have sandy soil, be sure to also put a ½ inch layer of rotted pine bark or rotter leaves on top of fertilizer.

See our “Planting a Tree Correctly” Guide & Espoma Bio-tone® and Citrus-tone® Fact Sheets on our website for more info.

CULTURE

Container citrus should be pruned to maintain a balanced shape, and to keep exuberant limbs from outgrowing the tree’s crown. Trees that aren't getting enough sun will become leggy. Partially prune leggy branches to encourage branching and bushiness, and try to find a sunnier spot. Periodically, trees will outgrow their containers. This is usually signaled by leaf shed or browning and twig dieback (unrelated to drought stress). At this point, you have two choices: move the tree to a larger pot, or lift it out, prune the roots, and put it back in the pot with some fresh soil. Remember that the ultimate size of the tree is directly related to the size of the container. If you want a larger tree, choose a new container, about 25% bigger, repot the tree, and fertilize as soon as the first new growth appears. If you are happy with the size of your tree, lift it out of the pot, cut about a quarter of the roots off, shake off the loose soil, and pot it with new soil, just as you would a new tree. Prune at least a third of the foliage off at the same time.

CULTURE

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Citrus trees are pollinated by bees. Be sure to set your trees outside when they are in bloom, so the bees can do their thing, and your trees will be able to do theirs. If you can't get the Trees and the Bees together, you'll have to fill in. Get a small camelhair artist's brush, gently pass it along the yellow pollen-covered stamens until the brush is coated with pollen, and touch it to the central pistil. You have just created a baby fruit! Repeat for each bloom.

FRUIT

Most citrus trees are too enthusiastic for their own good. You have to control them. Don't let small, young trees set too much fruit. You have to be very serious about thinning the blossoms. Wait until your tree is 3 years old before letting it fruit. The true goal of container culture is the perfect homegrown fruit. As your tree matures it will provide you with crop after crop of delicious citrus.