



Growing Lemon Trees and other Citrus

CITRUS VARIETIES

Lemons:

- Lisbon: Thick skinned, long bearing variety, usually thorny, medium height, strong flavour and good for Melbourne climate. Good in clay soils.
- Eureka: Tend to be thornless, good in cooler climates, more Summer bearing than other varieties, needs well drained soil.
- Meyer: Thin skinned variety, almost cross between an orange and lemon with a sweeter taste, Cold tolerant, smaller growing and not very thorny. Better for tubs.
- Lemon in tubs: Lemons can be grown in tubs - the bigger the tub the better - and they need lots of water, good potting mix and regular feeding and pruning. The best lemon to grow in a tub is the Meyer as it is more compact in habit.

Oranges:

A warm, sheltered position is required.

- Navel: Thin skinned and seedless fruit, borne in Winter and early Spring.
- Valencia: Late Spring - early Summer fruit bearing. Will fruit in cooler climates.

Mandarins: Prone to alternate fruit bearing. This may be reduced by thinning heavy crops (up to 25%). Fruit should not be left to ripen on the tree.

Grapefruit: Warm sheltered position required in Melbourne. Varieties include March Seedless and Wheeny (cooler climates).

Limes: Sensitive to frost.

Tahitian Lime: This variety is the best for Melbourne's climate and bears fruit from Autumn to Spring that can be used in drinks and cooking.

Kaffir Lime: The aromatic leaves can be used in Thai cooking.

Cumquat: Highly ornamental small tree which is more cold resistant than other citrus. Fragrant flowers and attractive small bitter orange fruits are suitable for marmalade. Excellent in tubs.

Calamodin: Similar to cumquat, only bigger fruit.

Planting and Soil

Citrus are shallow rooted trees which like good drainage and plenty of sun. They will grow in most soils except poorly drained, wet ones. If a young lemon tree is carrying a lot of fruit or even a lot of flower and buds, prune or pick most of them as they will retard growth and can cause leaf yellowing and shedding.

Pest and Diseases

Scale: Common to citrus especially in Summer. Ants can often be seen crawling up the trunk to get the sugars associated with scale which are oval shaped bumps adhering to the stems and leaves (usually brown or white). White Oil sprayed over the whole tree is safe and effective. You may need to do this more than once to bring the problem under control. Don't spray if the temperature is over 25°C.

Collar Rot: Appears as rotting bark around the base of the tree usually on older trees or trees with poor ventilation around the trunk. Cut off the bark and paint with Bordeaux Paste. If the tree is old and the problem is bad, then it is often best to take the tree out and start again.

Reasons why Citrus trees can look sick:

- The end of Winter usually produces some yellowing, mainly in younger trees.
- Too many fruit and buds, again mainly in young trees, can lead to yellowing and leaf drop. Remove the buds and fruit and feed moderately in Spring.
- Poorly drained soil or 'wet feet' can cause yellowing and shedding of leaves.
- Lack of food and/or water. This usually occurs in late Spring and Summer. Feed with citrus or complete fertiliser if tree is planted in the ground. If planted in tubs, feed your citrus with Blood and Bone, manure or Osmocote. Water frequently in Summer as citrus are surface rooting trees.
- Collar Rot can cause extensive leaf drop. This is more common in older trees. Check the lower trunk for rotting (see notes above).

Pruning and Reworking

If plants have dried out or shed leaves and look straggly, they can be pruned hard (or lightly) as desired. Spring - Summer is the best time for this. Some fruit and flowers may have to be sacrificed, however, it's worth it if a thick, bushy tree is required. Citrus can be almost leafless and still recover with pruning, feeding and watering. (Unless the problem is poor drainage or collar rot).

Espaliering of Citrus Trees

All citrus are suitable for espaliering and this is not difficult to do. Start with a young plant and tie back any limbs which are growing forward. It is important to have a strong framework eg. Lattice or strong wire to train the citrus onto and continue to tie back and prune limbs to encourage the growth in the direction you wish. Espaliering is popular for gardens which have limited space.