



CITRUS TREE GROWING GUIDE

Congratulations on becoming an owner of a new semi-dwarf citrus tree!

Below is a quick guide to getting your tree established and some tips for how to avoid common problems. More information is available at fourwindsgrowers.com. Now that you have unpacked the tree, be sure to remove the plastic bag that keeps the soil in place for shipping. Next, place your tree in a shady location for up to two weeks so your new tree can acclimate to its new home.

Acclimation:

Citrus trees are required to be greenhouse propagated to protect them from harmful diseases. It will shock the tree if you put it in direct sunlight for too long the first two weeks. The ideal location for a couple of weeks outside is a spot by the house with indirect sunlight that gets an hour or two of direct light throughout the day. After two weeks you can move your adjusted tree into its final location, which ideally gets 8+ hours of full sun daily.

Note: It is common for citrus trees to drop some of their leaves during this transition. Do not panic. Monitor the temperature outside and don't hesitate to bring the tree inside if you see that nighttime temperatures are going to be consistently below 35°F.

Location:

Almost all the citrus trees on our website are grafted on semi-dwarf rootstocks that are perfect for container growing. If planted in the ground semi-dwarf trees can be expected to reach up to 16 feet in height & width, depending upon variety. In a pot, the semi-dwarf trees will stay much smaller, especially with judicious pruning. Be sure to provide more space in the ground for standard size trees. Generally, a Semi Dwarf tree needs an 8'-10' diameter space. Citrus trees can be grown much closer together if your goal is to have a citrus hedge or a multi-variety bush.

This space should be a sunny, frost, and wind-free location with southern exposure for best results. If in doubt about the location, leave the tree in its plastic container and place it in the spot you have in mind. Water as needed, and after a week or two, you should be able to tell whether it's happy or not.

Citrus trees are sensitive to temperatures below freezing and will need to be protected to maintain tree health. If you are unable to provide adequate protection outside, consider growing your indoors by a sunny window. Indoor growers will need to be mindful of their heat vents as these can damage your tree roots if they are right next to the vent.

Planting:

For citrus tree success, good drainage is essential, as citrus trees can't survive standing water for long. For heavy or poor soils, we recommend digging a large hole and filling it back in, half with the best of the original soil, and half with a good-quality amendment mix.

Dig a planting hole about twice the size of the root mass. This hole should have a subtle taper down into the center of the hole. Backfill with a little bit of your amended soil mix and create a small mound to set your tree onto. Do not add fertilizer to the soil while backfilling your hole; however, you can apply some to the soil surface after planting.

Squeezing the sides of the plastic pot can help to loosen the soil and roots. Gently invert the container to remove the soil intact. Place the tree into the center of the hole and backfill with your amended soil mix. Be sure to tamp the soil lightly as you go and water thoroughly after planting to eliminate any large air pockets. Stake the tree as needed until well-established. Green plant tie is a good choice for tying trees to stakes. It's a good idea to repot every year or so, or when you see roots peeking through drainage holes.

Container Planting:

You want to start with a container that is about twice the size of the current root mass with lots of drainage holes (drill more if needed). Much like outdoor growing, you want to provide a warm location with 8+ hours of sun a day and plant in a well-draining soil mix. Use a Premium Soil Mix designed for citrus or consider using making a 5x1x1 mix if premium citrus soil mixes are not available. The 5x1x1 soil mix can be easily made with 5-parts coarse bark, 1-part Coarse perlite, and 1-part premium soil mix. Avoid putting gravel at the bottom of the container. Instead, get a large saucer that is a couple of inches wider than your container and a few inches deep. Place your gravel or river rock in the saucer, then place your newly planted citrus tree on top. This will create a reservoir for water that has drained through your tree and that will evaporate over time which will cause a subtle increase in the humidity around your tree.

Watering:

How often to water will vary on the environment and depends on soil porosity, tree size, and temperature. Allowing the top of the soil to dry out between watering is recommended. A simple moisture meter, available at garden supply stores, can be used to determine moisture down to about a 9" depth. Generally, when the meter indicates a root moisture level of about 50%, (center of the dial) it is time to water. Always store your moisture meter dry between uses to keep it functioning properly.

A wilted tree that perks up within 24 hours after watering indicates the roots got too dry. Adjust the watering schedule accordingly. A tree with yellow or cupped leaves or leaves that don't look perky after watering can indicate excessive watering and soggy roots. In that case, water less frequently.

Citrus trees prefer less frequent, deep watering to frequent, shallow sprinklings. Creating a watering basin around the drip line of the tree can aid in deep watering. As the tree grows, be sure to expand the basin as needed to keep it as wide as the spread of the branches. Deeper watering promotes deeper root growth and strengthens your tree. Generally, once-a-week watering works well for in-ground or container plantings. Be sure to adjust based on weather conditions. In general, it is best to water in the morning, but if plants are dry or wilted it is better to water them immediately, rather than wait until morning.

Mulch:

The use of mulches will conserve precious water and help inhibit weed growth. A 2"-3" layer of redwood shavings, fir bark, compost, or other organic matter can be very helpful for water retention. "Living mulches" such as nitrogen-fixing clovers can also be planted between trees in an orchard. To avoid root diseases, always keep grasses and other vegetation away from the root collar area. Keep all mulches at least six inches away from the base of the trunk.

Compost:

A thick layer of compost applied to your soil either around your fruit trees is an effective way to improve fertility immediately and over the long term as the compost breaks down. Compost comes in many forms and strengths. You may be inclined to jump for the strongest composted chicken manure but will burn your tree. Stick to well-composted steer, horse manures, or a blend of plant compost as they provide ample nutrients for trees without the risk of burning them.

Suckering:

Know where the graft union is on your tree. It can usually be seen as a diagonal scar between 4 and 8 inches from the soil. Remove all shoot growth below the graft. These so-called "suckers" take vitality from the top of the tree (the fruiting wood). Especially on young trees, they are very vigorous. Remove suckers as soon as they are observed.