Grow healthy citrus trees

• An easy-to-follow guide to achieving a perfect result.
• Outlines all the tools you will need for the job.
• Includes a materials checklist.

PLEASE NOTE:
Before starting this project or buying any materials, it is worth your time to read all steps thoroughly first to be sure you understand what is required.

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For fruit and beauty add a citrus tree or three – with a little help from Mitre 10.

One of the most familiar sights in Australian gardens must be the lemon tree. The fruit provides the home cook with a big range of culinary uses.

But why stop at just a lemon tree? There is a variety of citrus trees that grow well in home gardens, even in temperate zones. Oranges are rich in Vitamin C and popular for eating, juicing and making marmalade. Grapefruit are a breakfast favourite. Or how about a cumquat, whose fruit can be pickled, branded or made into marmalade.

There’s another good reason to have two or three citrus trees in your garden, as citrus is ornamental as well as useful. Their blossoms add colour and fragrance, while their glossy green foliage looks attractive all year round. Citrus trees are not difficult to grow, and this MitrePlan aims to show you how to do it, step-by-step.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FRUIT</th>
<th>VARIETY</th>
<th>MATURITY</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oranges</td>
<td>Washington Navel</td>
<td>Late Winter</td>
<td>Seedless</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Valencia (Seedless)</td>
<td>Spring/Summer</td>
<td>Juicy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Valencia</td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>Juicy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laneislate Navel</td>
<td>Spring/Summer</td>
<td>Thin rind</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Imperial</td>
<td>Apri/May</td>
<td>Small/medium size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>Emperor</td>
<td>Early Spring</td>
<td>Large/loose skin</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eilendale</td>
<td>Early Spring</td>
<td>Beautiful flavour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meyer</td>
<td>Late Spring</td>
<td>Smooth skin – hardy tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lemon</td>
<td>Lisbon</td>
<td>Early</td>
<td>Thorny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eureka</td>
<td>June (may fruit)</td>
<td>Less thorns</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 times yearly</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lemonade</td>
<td>As Above</td>
<td>Juice/drinks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limes</td>
<td>Tahitian</td>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>Large fruit</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>Small fruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grape-fruit</td>
<td>Wheeney</td>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>Lemon flavour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marsh</td>
<td>Apri/May</td>
<td>Seedless</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cumquats</td>
<td>Nagami</td>
<td></td>
<td>Both ornamental qualities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Calamondin</td>
<td></td>
<td>for conserves or liqueurs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Step 2: Purchasing

Citrus trees with glossy, deep green foliage indicate a strong, healthy plant (Fig. 1). So avoid buying any young tree with leaves that show any signs of paling or yellowing (Fig. 5) – they may be suffering from a lack of nitrogen. Check for rotting or decaying of the stem’s bark where the stem meets the potting mix within the container. This is called “collar rot” and these trees should be ignored. Look also for any sign of insect or pest attack (Fig. 3), or discolouration that may be caused by fungal disease (Fig. 4).
MitrePlan aims to show you how easy and not difficult to grow, and this is especially true for citrus trees that have two or three citrus trees or more in your garden, as citrus is easy to grow. Not only that, the green foliage looks attractive all year round. citrus trees have a fragrant perfume, while their glossy leaves provide the home cook with a wide variety of options for eating, juicing and making conserves or liqueurs.

There's another good reason to grow a citrus tree or two in your garden. Some of the fruits, like mandarins, are easily dried and used to make marmalade.

Here are some other popular varieties for you to try:

- **Calamondin:** known for conserves or liqueurs.
- **Lime:** known for its bright green foliage and attractive appearance.
- **Mandarin:** known for its juicy, sweet taste.
- **Eureka:** known for its sour taste.
- **Valencia:** known for its juicy, sweet taste.
- **Washington Navel:** known for its sweet, juicy taste.
- **Mandarin:** known for its sweet, juicy taste.
- **Emperor Early Spring:** known for its large, juicy fruits.
- **Imperial April/May:** known for its medium-sized fruits.
- **Mexican Summer:** known for its small fruits.
- **Tahitian Summer:** known for its large fruits.
- **Laneslate Navel:** known for its thin rind.

### Step 3: Garden position

Citrus trees love heat. They do best in a warm, sunny position, protected from frost and in well-drained soil. If the patio is your only sunny area, why not grow a citrus tree in a big tub? Wine barrels cut in half are perfect, or choose from the wide range of large plastic and terracotta pots available. Generally, the country’s warmer northern areas will produce better quality fruit than in southern regions, provided the trees are well watered during hot, dry summer periods. But this does not mean that citrus do not grow well in temperate regions. Lemons and grapefruit, for example, thrive in cooler areas but oranges and mandarins, while they can be grown, may not ripen so well. Most citrus trees are frost tender, especially lemons and mandarins. In very severe frosts, the bark on lower limbs as well as the main trunk may even split, allowing infection of wood rotting fungi. Drainage must be good. Citrus are susceptible to waterlogging and root rot can occur if the plant is subjected to long wet periods. Choose a deep, sandy-loam type well-drained soil if possible, although a loamy soil that is well-drained is sufficient.

### Step 4: Planting times

Citrus are available most of the year. In tropical and subtropical areas they can be planted anytime. In the southern states they are best planted September to May after the danger of frost has passed.

### Step 5: Planting

Young citrus trees from most Mitre 10 stores are usually sold in plastic grow bags or plastic pots. When you get your tree home and if you do not plan to plant it immediately, prevent the soil or potting mix around the roots from drying out. Give it a good soaking the day before planting, so that the soil does not fall away from the roots as you place it in the hole (Fig. 6).

To plant your tree, dig a hole wide and deep enough to accommodate the whole root system (Fig. 7). If the subsoil is heavy clay, be careful when digging that a saucer, or hollow, is not formed in the bottom which can fill with water and possibly drown the root system. To prevent this problem occurring, plant the tree onto a slight mound built up above the surrounding soil level (Fig. 7), or install some type of underground drainage before planting.

Place the tree in the hole, making sure the bud union is well above soil level. (The bud union (Fig. 8) is the slightly swollen area on the lower main stem where the variety of citrus is budded onto the rootstock below). Do not place any fertiliser below the root system at the planting stage – fertilising comes later when the new growth appears. Then cover the root system with soil, ensuring that the tree is upright and straight as you backfill. Firm the soil in around the roots as you go to get rid of any air pockets and water thoroughly when the hole is around half full (Fig. 9). Then continue in the same way until the hole is filled and water in thoroughly again.

### Step 6: Care and maintenance.

#### Watering

All citrus trees need plenty of water during their main growing periods of Spring and Summer. Moderate watering occasionally in Autumn and Winter may also be needed. But it is during the dry, hot summer months that it is important to keep the soil moist at all times with deep soakings. Light waterings only result in fine surface feeder roots dying when the soil dries out. The best way to keep your tree always well watered is to install a drip watering system. These are easy to install yourself, low-cost and highly efficient. Mulching will also help to prevent drying out. Simply spread organic mulch of composted poultry or animal manure, straw litter or the like over the surface directly under the drip line of the tree (Fig. 10). It will help to suppress weeds and improve soil structure as well (refer MitrePlan#48, “Making garden compost”). Take care to keep mulch away from the base of the tree.

#### Fertilising

Citrus need fairly large quantities of fertiliser. Use a complete citrus fertiliser; there are several brands available. Feed twice a year in early Spring and late Summer. Before applying citrus fertiliser, water the soil well under the canopy. Apply at the rate of 60gms per square metre of soil surface. For young trees, fertilise within the drip line area and water in thoroughly. As your tree matures, increase the rate annually by 500gms. Trees around six years and older should receive approximately three kilograms of citrus food each year. Do not cultivate under the tree as their fine feeder roots are just under the surface and they will be damaged.

#### Pruning

A light pruning of your young citrus tree before planting will help encourage growth. Remove about half the top growth by cutting straight across the top. You may find that your Mitre 10 store has already done this job for you. Citrus as a general rule tend to be self-shaping and do not require much pruning. However some varieties may benefit from some thinning out. Lemon trees once too large can be cut back to make them more compact. Remove any sucker growth and shots that emerge from below the graft (bud union). These are easily identified as they generally have a different foliage and often have large thorns.

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**Fig. 1** Healthy green growth like this indicates a good plant in peak condition.

**Fig. 2** Try not to use anything too harsh or you will kill your beneficial insects in the garden like these predatory ladybirds. When beneficial insects are about let them do their job first. If the problem gets too bad then spray.

**Fig. 3** Scale is a major problem with citrus, but natural predators will help as well as a spray for scale.

**Fig. 4** Yellow leaves showing nutrient deficiency. This plant needs a general Citrus fertiliser, applied in early spring.

**Fig. 5**

**Fig. 6**

**Fig. 7**

**Fig. 8**

**Fig. 9**

**Fig. 10**
Grow healthy citrus trees

MIGHTY HELPFUL HINTS TO MAKE THE JOB EASIER

Like most plants, citrus trees and fruit have some natural enemies. And except for brown rot which affects only lemons, the common citrus pests, diseases and remedies listed here apply to all citrus trees. Refer to MitrePlan#49, "Controlling common garden pests" for further assistance.

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Your local MITRE 10 Store is:

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