

Sensational Citrus

*Text of presentation by Annette McFarlane
at 2009 Ginger Flower Festival*

Why Grow Citrus?

According to ABS statistics:

12% of Australian households grow a lemon tree!

Citrus are:

- Ornamental as well as productive
- Provide year round production
- One size fits all. No matter how big or small your garden there is a citrus to fit.
- They even come in native varieties!

Despite all this there are pitfalls for less experienced gardeners!

Key Factors in Growing Great Citrus:

- **Good drainage.**

How do I know if my soil is well drained? Dig a test hole to a depth of at least 60cm and fill with water to determine how quickly the soil drains. If your soil is poorly drained – grow citrus in pots.

- **Soil Preparation**

Add compost and nutrients well in advance of planting. Adding these materials immediately prior to planting runs the risk of burning plant roots.

- **Regular Applications of Nutrients**

I try to reward my citrus trees at least once each year with:

- A thin layer compost (5cm) and a few handfuls of gypsum over the soil to just beyond the drip line
- Mulch with old lucerne (or cane mulch) to a depth of around 10cm.
- A few generous handfuls organic fertiliser and rock dust or some trace elements (according to application rate on pack). Apply all this on top of the mulch.
- Water in well with liquid seaweed.

Unless your soil is naturally nutrient rich, apply more nutrients (organic fertiliser and compost) and water with liquid seaweed on three other occasions during the year.

None of this will be of any use if you do not choose

- the correct variety for your region
- the correct rootstocks for your region

Choosing the right variety

- Ask a local what grows well in your area
- Look around you to see what grows well
- Ask advice from a reputable nursery outlet

I grow lots of citrus. Some of the best performers for my region (north west of Brisbane) are:

Tangelo – Minneola

Mandarin – Imperial and Hickson

Orange – Seedless Valencia and Joppa

Lime – Tahitian

Grapefruit – Ruby

Lemon – Meyer/Lots of Lemons, Villa Franca (primarily summer fruiting),

Lisbon, Eureka (primarily winter fruiting).

Choosing the correct rootstock

Buy your citrus from a reputable, local nursery outlet not from a market stall, supermarket, service station or anywhere that does not specialise in selling only plants! If you purchase a citrus tree that is grafted on to the incorrect rootstock for your region you will not know. The tree will fail to perform or die out after a few years due to rootstock incompatibility or disease.

Pest and disease control options

Trees that receive good nutrition are less prone to pests and diseases. If a problem occurs, always look at water and nutrition first and rectify any issues. Some products/equipment you might want to consider keeping on hand include:

Plant-based oil* (controls scale and black sooty mould, aphids, young stink bugs and fruit sucking bugs).

Barrier Glue* (stops ants reinfesting trees with scale)

Biodynamic Tree Paste* (protects against borers and feeds tree through the trunk. Not available in shops so make you own)

Spinosad sprays and baits* (for control of fruit fly)

Vacuum cleaner (suck up and dispose of any migrating stink bugs other pests)

(* See pest and diseases for further information and images)

**Replace non-productive ornamentals with a couple of citrus trees.
Prepare now and plant this coming winter and you may never have to buy citrus fruit ever again!**