

Grow Citrus Anywhere!

If you have always wanted to grow citrus trees but thought you didn't have the space, dwarf citrus trees are the answer you have been looking for. Not only are dwarf citrus trees perfect for porches, patios, and small yards, but they also allow for growing multiple varieties in larger yards in tropical and sub-tropical climates. They are also perfectly suited for growing citrus indoors anywhere else.

Our dwarf citrus trees are budded onto *Flying Dragon* rootstock which limits the mature growth of the tree to only about 25% of its normal size. That means that citrus trees that usually grow to 20 feet will only reach 5 or 6 feet tall. This small size is easily manageable on a patio or indoors and the tree should happily live in a container throughout its life.

Given proper care, dwarf citrus trees can live a lifetime. Key elements for success are good light, adequate humidity when kept indoors in the winter, well-drained potting soil, additional nutrients, and consistent watering. Dwarf trees have been known to be productive for up to 50 years.

Warning!

Be aware that many citrus trees sold in nurseries that are labeled "Patio Trees" are NOT true dwarf trees. In some cases, the label simply means that you can plant the tree just outside your patio area. Many times, "Patio Tree" is just a standard tree. Keeping it in a pot may slow the growth of the tree some and dwarf it slightly, but usually to the eventual detriment of the plant. With little room to grow, the roots will circle and the plant becomes "pot bound," making it hard for the tree to take up water and nutrients. What you end up with is a standard tree trying fruitlessly to grow to its normal large height. Purchasing a plant grafted on *Flying Dragon* rootstock eliminates these problems and allows the plant to grow to its mature size in a pot without feeling cramped or becoming an unproductive nuisance.

Fruit Characteristics

Although the tree is dwarfed, the fruit is not. The *Flying Dragon* rootstock actually produces the best quality fruit of any rootstock we are aware of. The fruit are standard-sized, but have more sugar and acid content (which results in more flavor), are juicier, and tend to keep better on the tree, which means you can harvest the fruit over a longer season. Additionally, growing citrus in pots allows for better control of the planting medium. Trees perform much better when planted in good potting soil.



Potting

If you are going to plant your dwarf tree in the ground, please follow the planting, care and maintenance instructions in our regular *Citrus* handout.

Container: Choose at least a 15-gallon pot (17-18" diameter). This size works well for smaller citrus trees like kumquats and calamondins. For other types of citrus, a pot of at least 25-gallon size (23" diameter) or larger is recommended. Because of the weight of the container, soil and plant, you will probably find it to your advantage to invest in a plant dolly to roll your tree in and out of your house or greenhouse as the weather changes. You can also work your way up to a 15-25 gallon planter, starting with the original pot

and planting into the next larger container every two years or so. Be sure your container drains freely, raising it off the ground if necessary. Extra holes can be drilled to insure adequate drainage

Media: Put an inch to an inch and one-half of small rock in the bottom of the pot (small river rock works great). Use a piece of broken clay pot or a larger rock to cover the holes in the pot so the small rock doesn't fall through. Next, plant the tree in a high-quality container mix. We have had wonderful results using **Fafard Container Mix**. Add a few cups of organic **Citrus-Tone**. Put enough soil on top of the rock so that the base of the tree is about two inches below the top of the pot and the tree is centered in the pot. Before planting, scrape a small amount of soil and root hairs away from the sides of the tree. Ensure that the tree is planted no deeper than it was in the original pot. Then fill in around the sides. For best results, the soil in the pot should be refreshed every 1 to 3 years.

Selecting a Location for Outdoor/Indoor Containers

Whether planted in a pot or in the ground, a sunny, frost- and wind-free location with southern exposure is best. If in doubt, leave the tree in its plastic container and place it in the spot you have in mind. After a week or two, you

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should be able to tell whether or not it's happy. Reflected heat from sidewalks or houses can also help to create a warmer "microclimate." Avoid lawns that get frequent, shallow waterings. Most citrus can also be grown and fruited in greenhouses or solariums. Simulate a subtropical environment by keeping temperatures between 55-95°F. Temperatures should never exceed 100°F.

Water

Trees love humidity, but hate continuously wet roots, so be careful not to overwater your tree. This can be accomplished by allowing the rootball to dry well, but not to the point of wilt, then soak heavily. Citrus prefer less frequent, deep waterings to frequent, shallow sprinklings. Here, this usually means deep watering once every three days. In general, it is probably best to water in the morning, but if plants are dry or wilted it is better to water them right away rather than to wait until morning. A wilted tree that perks up within 24 hours after watering indicates the roots got too dry. Adjust your 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. Water less frequently. Consistency is the key to citrus watering! A simple **moisture meter** will read moisture at the root level. Take it from us — this inexpensive tool will become your best friend! You'll never again have to guess about whether or not a plant needs water. Additionally, citrus foliage benefits from being misted with water in winter months and heated rooms may need additional humidity. Misting, trays of pebbles, or humidifiers will help the leaves stay lush and healthy.

Light & Temperature

Citrus like five or more hours of sunlight each day. Indoors, trees should be grown near a bright sunny window. Full-spectrum fluorescent grow lights are the best supplement in low-light indoor conditions. Light is a key element for flower production in the spring. Winter foliage will tolerate *slightly* lower light conditions. If you live in an area with cold winters and hot summers, you might consider treating your citrus as an indoor/outdoor plant. Citrus grow best between 55° and 85°F. They generally need to be kept above freezing (32°F), while indoor temperatures averaging 65°F are excellent.

While no citrus trees are cold-tolerant enough to withstand below zero conditions, trees grafted on *Flying Dragon* rootstock are more cold-hardy than those on any other rootstock currently available. This allows growers in northern areas to leave their potted trees outside for most of the year and growers in marginal southern coastal areas and northern parts of Florida, south Alabama and south Georgia to experiment with growing the plants outside, in pots or in-ground, year-round.

Fertilizer

Sprinkle **Osmocote Plus** or **Dynamite 14-14-14** fertilizer generously over the top of the pot. Repeat every four months. Spray your tree often, even monthly, with **Maxicrop Liquid Seaweed** to boost its health. **Citrus Nutritional Spray**, which can be combined with the **Seaweed**, should be applied three or four times a year. Problem trees should be sprayed frequently (see us for a regimen) with **KeyPlex Citrus**. Healthy trees also greatly benefit with 4 or 5 sprays a year.

Pruning

Citrus may be pruned to any desired shape. Pruning is fine any time of year, except in the winter for outdoor trees. Pinching back tips of new growth is the best way to round out the trees without impacting future fruit. Citrus will look fuller with occasional pruning to shape leggy branches. Very leggy branches indicate the need for more light. Some trees may develop erratic juvenile growth above the graft. If so, prune for shape and balance. Any growth above the graft can eventually bear fruit.

Fruit

Usually, once dwarf citrus trees are about 3 years old, they are mature enough to handle fruit production. Younger trees are capable of bearing, but doing so slows branch and foliage growth, which are important for the tree's long-term development. Keep in mind that all citrus fruits only ripen on the tree. One way to determine ripeness for oranges is to watch for the color to change to orange, then check for a slight softening of the fruit. However, the best way to determine ripeness is to pick a fruit and sample it, since rind color is an unreliable indicator. Sometimes an opaque sheen will develop on the skin. Lemons are ready when yellow, and generally hold on the tree for months. Limes are smaller and ready when green; again, watch for a slight softening. For lemons and limes, the time from bloom to edible fruit is generally 6-9 months. For oranges and other citrus, it is generally 12 months.

Pests & Disease

The best advice for insect and disease control is to prevent problems by following good cultural practices as outlined above. Drought-stressed, over-watered, badly planted, and improperly fertilized plants are more susceptible to pest and disease problems than well-nourished plants. We suggest that you use controls which are safer than traditional pesticides. Rockledge Gardens carries a full line of safe solutions.

Insect and fungus damage usually results in discolored or distorted leaves or fruit. Check the tree carefully and often. Many pests like the crevices where the leaf joins the stalk as well as the undersides of leaves. For a more detailed description of particular pests, refer to a citrus or fruit book. Also, you may bring a sample in a sealed plastic bag to us for identification and recommendations for a cure.