



How to Grow Citrus in the Chihuahuan Desert



Dwarf and semi-dwarf citrus are orchard-proven fruit producing trees, grafted onto dwarfing rootstock. Grown in the ground they create a very productive tree 8-10 feet tall. Grown in pots they will be a smaller productive tree 6-8 feet tall.

Planting location

A sunny, wind free southern or eastern exposure is best. Protection during the winter is essential when temperatures drop below 32 degrees. Sheltered courtyards, patios and atriiums are ideal areas for citrus. to protect outdoor plants use drop cloths, tarps or remay covers on frosty nights. If planted in a pot, move indoors to a sunroom or sunny window for the winter months. Limes and lemons are more sensitive to the cold than mandarins, kumquats and oranges.

Transplanting

Good drainage is needed, so amend your garden soil with 1/2 compost. For pots, use a high quality potting mix with good drainage. The root ball is tender, so use care when transplanting. Do not plant too deeply. Plant the same level as the container and stake until established.

General Care

Let the soil dry one inch on top and then water deeply and thoroughly. They like even and constant moisture, but the fruit will drop if kept too wet. Citrus are heavy feeders. Use a balanced fertilizer such as Carl Pool or Espoma organics for citrus. Yellow leaves are a sign of nitrogen deficiency or over/under watering. Insect damage is not usually a problem but you might see some aphids or scale develop. For aphids, cut off the problem areas and wash with a jet of water in the heat of the day. Repeat in 3-5 days with the water wash. For scale, dip a q-tip in rubbing alcohol and remove the scale. Repeat as needed. Outdoor trees might be affected by the larvae of Giant Swallowtail butterflies. They resemble bird droppings and will feed on the leaves. We leave them alone and count on the tree to push out new leaves after the feeding has stopped.

Pruning

Find the graft site on your tree near the base of the trunk. Remove any green growth below the graft line. The suckers might be green and vigorous, but they will not bear fruit and have thorns. Your tree may be pruned to any desired shape. Prune any time of year except the winter.

Enjoy

For large crops, juice the citrus, freeze in ice cube trays and transfer to baggies in the freezer. You can also freeze the zest. This way you can have your homegrown juice all year long.