

# All about Citrus

Oranges, lemons and naartjies are popular winter fruits. With sweet scented blossoms and glossy evergreen foliage, citrus plants are wonderful additions to any garden.

In areas where it is not very cold in winter, you can grow citrus, such as naartjies, lemons and oranges. Although citrus is known to grow best in warm no-frost areas such as the Lowveld, they can be grown successfully in areas that experience frost, as long as they are protected. Citrus plants therefore grow relatively easily and will provide you and your family with lots of healthy and organic fruit to enjoy during the cold winter months.

Here are some tips for success with citrus:

- Position your citrus plants carefully. Most citrus trees are sensitive to frost. If your garden receives frost, plant your citrus next to a west-facing wall, where they will receive afternoon sun. In addition, the wall will radiate warmth during the night. Also check with your local nursery about citrus varieties that are less sensitive to frost, such as the calamondin (*Citrofortunella microcarpa*). You can also plant citrus in containers on a sheltered patio.
- Lemons, naval oranges, certain naartjie varieties, clementines and limes grow well in regions that experience mild frost.
- Kumquats, lemons and certain mandarin trees can grow well in areas that received moderate frost, provided fruit matures fully before the frosts begin.
- Prepare the soil. Citrus need soil that drains well. If your soil is heavy, add well-matured compost or grow your citrus in containers with a potting mix that drains well. The easiest way to kill a citrus plant is to leave it in dense, soggy soil.
- Water your plant correctly. Allow the soil to drain out before watering. To check soil moisture, dig down 15 cm and take soil sample – if it sticks together after squeezing in your hand, you do not need to water for another week. Avoid watering foliage, water the soil only. Citrus plants will droop if over-watered and will produce soft, small fruit that tends to drop.
- Keep the soil mulched. Mulching will maintain soil moisture levels. However, keep the mulch away from the stem to prevent stem rot and other diseases.
- Fertilise regularly. Apply a 3:1:5 fertiliser three times a year – in March, July and December – at the rate of 500 g an application to a young tree and 1 kg an application to a mature tree. Reduce applications in half for plants in pots. Keep the fertiliser at least 15 cm away from the stem and water thoroughly after applying.
- Watch out for pests and diseases. Pimples on the leaves are caused by citrus psylla – spray with an organic pest control to keep this pest at bay.

Remember to keep the soil around your plant weed free, as

<http://www.seedsweet.com/img/oranges.jpg>



weeds compete with plants for water. It is not necessary to prune citrus plants, unless to remove dead wood. Dead wood can harbour fungal diseases and is also unsightly. If you do decide to prune your citrus plant do so in July.

One of the benefits of citrus fruit is that it can hang on the tree for a relatively long period of time before rotting, so you only need to pick the fruit when you require. Suitable for both container and garden planting, citrus plants are healthy and functional plants for your garden.

For more information on growing citrus in South Africa, please visit [www.lifeisagarden.co.za](http://www.lifeisagarden.co.za).

## Make lemonade squash

Make a refreshing cordial using the organic lemons you have grown in your garden.

- 8 lemons
- 1 cup (250 ml) water
- 1 1/2 cups (375 g) sugar

Grate two of the lemons finely and keep the grated rind. Squeeze the rest of the lemons as well as the grated ones to remove the juice. Put the juice, the water, the sugar and the grated rind in a large pot and mix over a medium heat until dissolved. Do not boil. Let the cordial cool and pour into sterilised bottles. Dilute with water. Double or triple the recipe to make more.



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