

Growing citrus in containers

Big ideas for small gardens

Type of container:	Traditionally citrus were grown in terracotta pots. Being porous they prevent the plant from becoming waterlogged and keep the root zone cooler than plastic pots. There are many brightly colored containers available now, alternatively use wooden tubs. It is advisable to paint the inside of these with a bituminous paint (available from hardware stores) to prevent the timber rotting. Make sure that all containers have sufficient drainage holes in the base of the container. Good drainage is vital for all citrus.
Potting up:	Immediately before potting up into the container and before removing from the plastic pot, water thoroughly. This helps the roots to release from the plastic container in which the plant was originally grown. Avoid damaging the roots when transplanting. The ideal time to re-pot is late spring through to early autumn. If available, put a 50mm layer of wood ash (charcoal) in the base of the pot. This acts as natural soil sweetener and improves drainage. Always use a premium grade potting mix to which has been added a generous amount of old cow or chicken manure. Leave the mix 50mm below the rim of the container for deep watering. Plant the citrus at the same level as that which it was in the original plastic pot. Higher will cause collar rot.
Watering:	Immediately after potting up water thoroughly to remove any air pockets around the roots and allow the mix to settle. Multicrop Seaweed Plant Nutrient encourages new root growth. Never allow the potting mix to dry out; this means perhaps daily watering in summer, reducing the frequency in the cooler months. Do not place a saucer under the pot, as this prevents good drainage, causing root rot and possible death of the plant. Raise the container off the ground to increase drainage. A good deep soaking by filling the container to the brim is the ideal.
Feeding:	This is the most neglected aspect of all container growing. Plants must be fed regularly to encourage flowering and subsequently more fruit feed in the main growing season, but not during peak flowering time. In addition to Multicrop mentioned above I also recommend organic Multicrop EcoFish organic natural fertiliser or Neutrog Seamungus , a combination of pelletised seaweed and chook poo (from free-range hens). Keep all fertilisers away from the trunk of the plant as these can severely burn the bark.
Pests & diseases:	Citrus are not subject to many pests and diseases and a well-fed healthy growing plant will resist most of these problems. Caterpillars can mostly be picked off the tree, or use Yates' Dipel . Other chewing/sucking insects can be controlled with Multicrop EcoPest Oil . Only spray if necessary and follow the manufacturer's directions exactly.
Pruning:	No systematic pruning is necessary, other than to trim back shoots extending beyond the symmetry of the required shape and form or removing any dead, diseased or damaged branches.

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