



Citrus

Introduction:

Citrus are a perennial favourite in Australia, with most back yards having the traditional lemon tree tucked in somewhere. With their glossy foliage and delightfully fragrant flowers, there is certainly no reason why you shouldn't enjoy having your own.

Growing citrus:

Citrus love a sunny position, with at least half a day of sun, preferably afternoon sun. Limes in particular require a warm position here in Melbourne as they come from milder climates. They love a well-drained soil, and may suffer from collar rot if the soil is too heavy. Protection from strong winds is also advisable, as this prevents damage to plants resulting in misshapen leaves and fruit. Citrus can be grown in pots, with smaller varieties being particularly suitable. Just make sure you have a really nice sized pot, at least 40cm in diameter, and use good quality potting mix.

Potted citrus can be planted all year. When choosing a tree, select a plant that is growing strongly with green glossy foliage and a good branching structure. All citrus should be grafted to make them more resistant to diseases such as collar rot. Prepare the soil by digging in some good quality compost or manure. When planting make sure that the tree is buried to the same level as it was in the pot. Don't build up the soil around the trunk of the tree. If the soil is heavy clay, build a mound to plant into to aid drainage. Water in well with Plant Starter or a seaweed based fertiliser.

Water your plant regularly after planting during the establishment period. When trees are established, water approximately once a week during the cooler months and 2-3 times a week during summer. Of course this will vary according to the weather conditions and your soil type. Regular summer watering will help good fruit production. Plants in pots will of course require more watering, as they dry out more quickly. It may even be every day during summer.

Feed with fruit and citrus food every 6-8 weeks, starting in August and continuing until March. If the leaves remain a pale colour, an occasional feed with Epsom salts will help them to green up. CAUTION: Not all fruit and citrus fertilisers are suitable for pots. Check the back of the pack before applying to potted citrus. If in doubt use a controlled release fertiliser like Debcote plus regular liquid feeds with Charlie Carp or Phostrogen.

Citrus are shallow rooted and benefit from regular mulching, especially during summer. Water and fertilise well before applying mulch and again, keep the mulch away from the trunk of the tree to prevent collar rot.